

THE PATMOS LETTER



THE APOSTLE JOHN



J. L. CAMPBELL D.D.

**PROPERTY OF
THE CHURCH ON THE WAY**

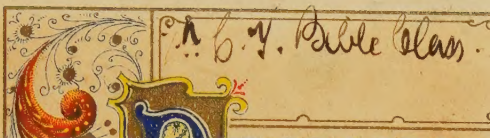
OCT 03 '00

B. C.

BR 185 .C357

**Campbell, J. L. (John Lorne),
1845-1928.**

The Patmos letters : messages to the
church of the twentieth century with



P. A. B. Y. Bible Class.

PRESENTED

to
Miss Paterson
Henderson

1. 28

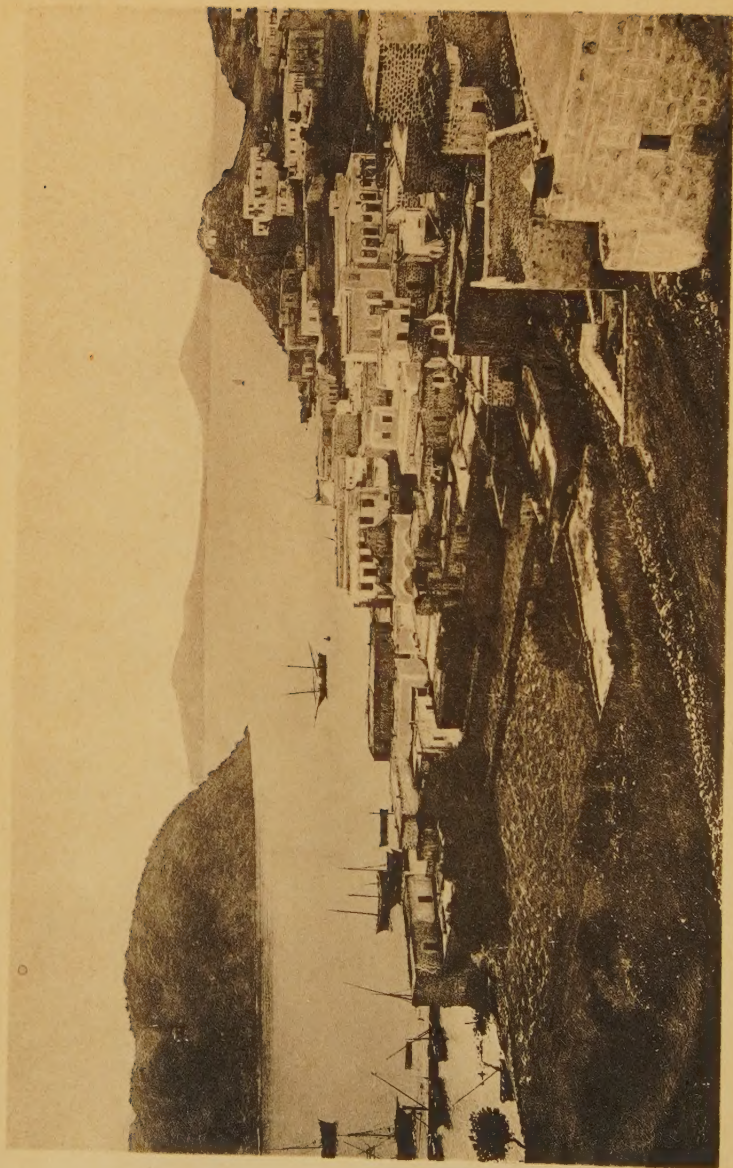


London, E.C. 4 (and at Glasgow)

THE PATMOS LETTERS



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025



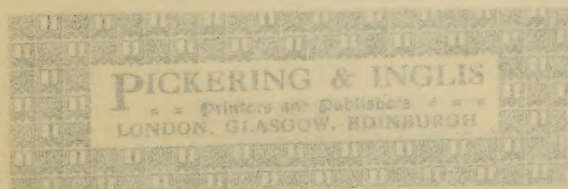
THE PATMOS LETTERS

Applied to Modern Christendom

J. L. CAMPBELL, D.D.

The Harbour of Patmos.

PROPERTY OF
THE CHURCH ON THE WAY



THE PATMOS LETTERS

Applied to Modern Christendom

J. L. CAMPBELL, D.D

PROPERTY OF
THE CHURCH ON THE WAY

PICKERING & INGLIS
= = Printers and Publishers = = =
LONDON, GLASGOW, EDINBURGH

TO HER
TO WHOM I OWE
MORE THAN ALL OTHERS IN THIS WORLD,
MY BELOVED AND HONOURED WIFE,
THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY AND
TENDERLY DEDICATED.

FOREWORD

IN connexion with these studies I have ventured to offer my own translation from the Greek of the seven Patmos letters, and also of the Scriptures on which the first two chapters are based. In this way certain distinctions are brought out that do not appear in the versions with which we are familiar.

It would be difficult to enumerate all the works that have been consulted in the preparation of these pages, but I have sought to recognize anything of importance that has come from other sources in the appropriate place. Especially among them must be named Professor W. M. Ramsay's recent book on "THE LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES," with its valuable historical and geographical information.

I wish also to record my indebtedness to one who was born at my native home, and who has been a warm personal friend of many years,

Rev. James P. McNaughton, a beloved and God-honoured missionary in Smyrna. At great pains he secured for me the photographs of Patmos and of the sites of the seven churches that are found in the following pages, and spared neither time nor effort to procure the very latest and the best.

It is believed that these messages to the churches at the close of the first century are peculiarly adapted to the needs of the churches at the opening of the twentieth century. May God the Holy Spirit use them to the quickening of His own people.

J. L. CAMPBELL.

CAMBRIDGE,

MASSACHUSETTS.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION:	
SECTION I—OUR FIELD OF STUDY . . .	13
SECTION II—THE SEER AND THE VISION . . .	33
THE PATMOS LETTERS:	
I CHRIST'S LETTER TO THE MOTHER CHURCH OF EPHESUS, THE CHIEF CITY OF ASIA . . .	57
II CHRIST'S LETTER TO THE PERSECUTED CHURCH OF SMYRNA, THE CITY OF THE GOLDEN CROWN	79
III CHRIST'S LETTER TO THE INDULGENT CHURCH OF PERGAMUM, THE CITY OF IMPERIAL POWER	101
IV CHRIST'S LETTER TO THE DIVIDED CHURCH OF THYATIRA, THE CITY OF THE IMPERILLED PLAIN	123
V CHRIST'S LETTER TO THE LIFELESS CHURCH OF SARDIS, THE CITY OF DEPARTING GREAT- NESS	145
VI CHRIST'S LETTER TO THE MISSIONARY CHURCH OF PHILADELPHIA, THE CITY OF CONSTANT UNREST	165
VII CHRIST'S LETTER TO THE TEPID CHURCH OF LAODICEA, THE CITY OF SELF-COMPLACENCY	189

The Revelation of Jesus Christ
Rev. 1. 1.

“ John, to the seven churches which are in Asia : Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is coming ; and from the seven Spirits that are before His throne ; and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.”

Rev. 1. 4, 5.



THE PATMOS LETTERS

INTRODUCTION

Section I.—Our Field of Study

IT is remarkable that this Revelation of Jesus Christ is the only book in the whole Bible which has a special blessing attached to its study, and yet there is certainly no book in the New Testament so little read or appreciated. A blessing is pronounced on him who “reads” and on them that “hear the words” and “keep the things” that are written therein.¹

Why has the book been thus neglected? Two reasons are assigned: First, the confessed obscurity of certain of the prophetic portions—an obscurity arising necessarily from the very nature of the subject; and secondly, the great mass of confused literature written with a view to its exposition. A sense of hopelessness has come over

¹ Rev. 1. 3.

many in regard to the teaching of this Revelation, and a conviction that no one can be sure of anything about it. The last book of the Bible is consequently laid aside, and its precious pages are but seldom perused and studied.

We confess frankly and at once, that there are mysteries here which we cannot as yet make clear. Side by side with this admission, we ought to recognize equally that there are truths in this great book that lie on the very surface and are manifest to all—truths without which the church would be poor indeed. We can derive from it all that is needed at this stage of the world's development. More light will yet break from these pages as the scroll of history unfolds itself. "Blessed," therefore, "is he that keepeth the words of the prophecy of this book."¹

A brief general survey of the whole field will help us in our more detailed investigations.

I. According to Irenaeus, the book of Revelation was written during the great persecution which took place "toward the end of Domitian's reign," i.e. between the years 93 and 96 of the Christian era. This is the view which was over-

¹ Rev. 22. 7.

whelmingly held by the early church, and we hold it to be the correct one. The Preterist theory which attempts to assign its date to the persecution under Nero, who died in the summer of the year 68, breaks down in every direction. Nero's persecution was restricted to Rome, and there is nothing to show that it ever extended to Asia Minor. There is no evidence that Nero ever banished Christians—he put them to death; while banishment is distinctively known as a form of punishment inflicted by Domitian.

The Epistle to the Ephesians written A.D. 61 or 62 abounds with tributes to the love then existing among them. When Paul wrote his last letter, the second Epistle to Timothy, in the spring of A.D. 68, Timothy was yet the pastor at Ephesus, and the young church would still be in the glow of its first love.

The condition of the seven churches, as described in the Patmos letters, implies that they had been in existence for some considerable time. They were fully constituted and equipped. They had a history behind them that had developed with time into distinctive and matured characteristics. Errors had become deeply rooted and widespread. Opportunity for repentance was

given and not acted upon. To suffer martyrdom was no new thing among them, as it would have been under Nero; but was something of long standing in the recollection of the churches.

Differences of style from the other writings of John can be accounted for by the nature of the subject and by other causes. Hengstenberg¹ has shown how completely the contents of the book of Revelation harmonize in detail with Domitian's time as they do with no other period. We may accept it, therefore, as settled that here we are in the closing years of the first century.

1. In contrast with the Old, we have but this one distinctively prophetic book in the New Testament. One reason for this is that the whole of the earlier economy, as such, is gazing with eager expectancy into the future. Type and shadow and prophecy alike are scanning the horizon for the coming of the dawn. The men of old time were longing for the first advent of the Messiah, and the establishment of the Kingdom of God in the hearts of the people. In the New Testament He has come, and at His coming the heavens broke forth into midnight song. The types

¹ "Apocalypse," Vol. I. Introduction.

and shadows are no more ; and much, but not all, of Old Testament prophecy has been fulfilled and changed into New Testament history. How consoling it is that the Bible does not leave us here ! Were this the case, the future would be but a blank.

A great storm of persecution was now sweeping over the Roman world, and it seemed as if Christianity were about to perish in darkness with the close of the century in which it was born. Then it was that this Apocalypse lifted the curtain of the future, blazed a pathway of light through the darkness of the coming ages, and in a series of majestic and impressive symbols traced the history of the Kingdom to its ultimate and glorious consummation.

The Old Testament looks forward to the first advent ; the Apocalypse looks forward to the second advent. How touching and sublime the words with which it closes the Canon of Scripture : “ Amen, come, Lord Jesus ! ” No wonder, then, that in times of persecution and sorrow the Church has always found refuge in the book of Revelation. When every other comfort failed, this book has always been a guiding star to the people of God in their night of

suffering and gloom ; yea, even a morning star anticipating and presaging the coming of a bright and cloudless day, of which it is foretold "there shall be no night there."

The imagery of our hymnology descriptive of heaven is principally taken from Revelation, which is as it were a spiritual counterpart of the first chapter of Genesis, leading us upward and onward through successive great stages (the number seven is found in both books), until through convulsion and upheaval and storm, chaos ultimately becomes cosmos, and God finishes again His mighty work. Then, too, in both alike, when all is done, we rest in His blessed Sabbath.

2. Another instructive characteristic of Revelation is its essentially Hebrew atmosphere ; while, at the same time, its intensity and fire suggest the language of the common people. This helps, also, to explain the peculiarity of its style. There is not one single direct quotation in it from the Old Testament, yet the book is simply saturated with Old Testament imagery, drawn especially from Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah.

The description of the glorified Christ seen by John in Patmos ¹ is anticipated in the book of

¹ Rev. 1. 13.

Daniel.¹ The rainbow-circled throne of Revelation² meets us first in Ezekiel.³ The scroll written within and without will be found both in Ezekiel⁴ and Zechariah.⁵ Tears are wiped away by God in Isaiah⁶ first, before they appear also in Revelation.⁷ The measuring reed and the two witnesses and the two olive trees and the two lampstands in Revelation 11. are all found in the book of Zechariah.⁸ Daniel saw the beasts emerge from the sea before John did so.⁹ The description of Babylon and its overthrow in Revelation 17. and 18., is clothed almost wholly in Old Testament language. Gog and Magog¹⁰ appear for the first time in Ezekiel.¹¹ The great judgment scene,¹² when the books were opened is taken from Daniel.¹³ The new heaven and the new earth¹⁴ await us in Isaiah,¹⁵ while the new Jerusalem and the river and tree of life are also found in Ezekiel¹⁶; such instances might be multiplied. Limiting ourselves therefore to what we are sure about, there is a charm and a fascin-

¹ Dan. 10. 5, 6, 7, 9.

² Rev. 4. 3.

³ Ezek. 1. 26-28. ⁴ Ezek. 2. 9.

⁵ Zech. 5. 1-3.

⁶ Isa. 25. 8. ⁷ Rev. 7. 17.

⁸ Zech. 4. 11-14.

⁹ Dan. 7. 3 and Rev. 13. 1-3.

¹⁰ Rev. 20. 8.

¹¹ Ezek. 38. 2 and 39. 1.

¹² Rev. 20. 12.

¹³ Dan. 7. 10 and 12. 1.

¹⁴ Rev. 21. 1.

¹⁵ Isa. 65. 17, 19 and 66. 22.

¹⁶ Ezek. 47. 1-12.

ation in the study of the book of Revelation found perhaps nowhere else throughout the Bible.

As Lange has said,¹ if you wish to get any idea of the abounding wealth contained in the Apocalypse, and there woven together with matchless art, just fix your eyes on "the grand similitudes, the rich maxims, the significant dialogues, the warm exhortations, the glowing prayers, the New Testament songs, the sublime doxologies which it contains."

Dr. Broadus² recounts a touching incident which occurred in his own household. He arranged to read the Revelation through chapter by chapter at family worship. He found that the children and even the coloured servants became more deeply interested in it than in any other portion of the Bible. Up to the fifth chapter he made a few explanatory remarks ; but when he came to the opening of the seals and the sounding of the trumpets, he was not so sure of the interpretation, and accordingly he stopped explaining. But they all urged him to keep on the reading. "At length, after many days, we were far on in the middle of Revelation ; and as I was reading some of that splendid, solemn,

¹ Lange, "Revelation," p. 55. ² Vol. of Sermons, p. 186.

impressive imagery that is there presented like the unrolling of a mighty panorama—scene after scene of wonder and power, struggle and conflict, hope and promise—I looked up through my tears, and all the circle, from the aged grandmother down to the little child, were in tears too. You may say we did not know exactly what it was about. Yes, we did. It was about God.” Aye, about God, indeed, and about His working out of His own mighty purposes of grace through the struggles and sorrows of human history, together with the blessed assurance that all is yet “to end in complete victory, and in everlasting peace and joy.”

II. But now let us draw a little nearer to the study which lies before us. The book falls into three great sections. “Write,” said the Lord Jesus to John,¹

1. “The things that thou sawest.” The glorious vision in the first chapter.

2. “The things which are.” The seven churches described in the second and third chapters.

3. “And the things after these,”² from the fourth chapter to the end.³

¹ Rev. i. 19.

² μετὰ ταῦτα.

³ Barnes on “The Revelation,” p. 80.

As a preparation let us, in imagination, visit Patmos and seek to behold the risen Christ, and then pass on to study the second section, the things that are—the seven churches.

The Roman Province of Asia embraced the four countries of Mysia, Lydia, Caria, Phrygia, with some of the islands off the shore of the Mediterranean, including Patmos. It was the most wealthy, cultured and civilized portion of the Roman Empire on the Asiatic Continent. So populous was it that it was called “The province of five hundred cities.”¹ There were many more churches in it than the seven mentioned by John. Troas, Colossae, Hierapolis (and Miletus probably), are spoken of in the New Testament, and church history mentions yet others.

In Acts 19. 10 we are told “all they that dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.” We are justified, therefore, in assuming that in many, if not all, of the chief centres of population there were to be found at this time churches of Jesus Christ. Why, then, were these churches chosen as the seven to which epistles were to be written, and other churches, some of them apparently more pro-

¹ “Expositor’s Bible,” Vol. VI, p. 10.

minent, left out ? Two main answers have been given to this question. One is the prophetic view. It may be stated as follows :—

“Seven” represents completeness. According to this theory, each church stands for a distinct section or period of church history, beginning with the first century and continuing down to the end of time. The seven churches are intended to prefigure the whole. Lange arranges a table in which he professes to find parallels between the seven churches and certain prophetic portions of the remainder of Revelation. Both in the Romish church prior to the Reformation and in the Reformed churches after, this view powerfully influenced religious thought. Of course, the schemes adopted by these two religious bodies were very different. Especial prominence was given to the discussion of this subject in Holland during the seventeenth century.

Speaking generally, the view now held by some Protestants may be expressed thus :—Christianity during the first century was in its primitive purity ; but towards the end of this period its love began to wane. This is represented by Ephesus. The time when

the church passed through its most terrible persecution dates, apparently, from the death of the Apostle John until Constantine ascended the throne. This is represented by the suffering church in Smyrna. Pergamum, where Satan's throne was, represented the rise of the Papal power. Thyatira, with her Jezebel, corresponding with the Scarlet Woman of Babylon (ch. 17), is deemed to coincide with the Papacy at the time of its full supremacy. But now difficulties begin to appear. Instead of the great spiritual awakening that was represented by the Reformation, we have the dead church of Sardis. Then, instead of the missionary age represented by the church of Philadelphia, culminating in the Millennium, it is followed by the lukewarm period as seen in the church at Laodicea. The variations of this scheme are almost limitless, and there is a great lack of agreement among themselves. No amount of arbitrary arrangement will make the key fit all the wards of the lock.¹ All that can be said truthfully is that in some instances the coincidences are

¹ See Trench on "The Epistles to the Seven Churches," p. 308.

very remarkable ; but a wise expositor will be careful to avoid fanciful interpretations.

The second theory is the historical one, and this is undoubtedly the correct one. The seven churches were addressed because these exact conditions existed among them, and they needed these precise exhortations, warnings and encouragements, from Him who is walking in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. And, moreover, these seven selected churches are representative of the church universal.

The messages apply wherever the conditions are found. Just as the Gentile letters of Paul addressed primarily to churches in seven localities were not simply for them, but also for us, so is it with the seven letters in Revelation. They were not written simply to individual churches on the eastern shore of the Aegean, but to all churches, on all shores, and in all ages. Seven is the perfect number. In these seven wonderful Apocalyptic letters we shall see “ every phase of Christian life and Christian experience clearly depicted—the secret of a church’s strength, and the safeguards by which it may be maintained ; while, on the other hand, we may learn the dangers, temptations, and evil influences, by which

churches as well as individuals may fall away.”¹ How priceless, therefore, the studies that lie before us !

III. Let us approach our subject yet more closely. The Author of the letters in every case is Jesus Christ, and John of Patmos is simply the amanuensis. “Write these things,” said He whom the Apostle saw in His glory when he was “in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day.” We have here, therefore, the very words of the Master. With what reverence should the churches hearken to these messages to-day ! The letters are perfect in form. We have,

1. A Character.
2. A Commendation.
3. A Condemnation.
4. A Call.
5. A Counsel and Reward.

Not all these occur in every instance ; but this is the general plan on which the Epistles are constructed.

The Character in which the Master introduces Himself is by some attribute or description taken from the great vision in the first

¹ “The Messages to the Seven Churches,” Canon Tait, p. 462.

chapter. Thus the three chapters are bound together. And as we shall see, there is always a striking appropriateness between the way in which Christ is presented and the peculiar needs and conditions of the church addressed.

After this we have the Commendation. The good points in the church are invariably first seen. For these the Master is ever eagerly seeking. Each of these commendations is introduced with the words "I know." In the case of the afflicted church in Smyrna it is, "I know thy affliction"; in the case of the perilously situated church of Pergamum it is, "I know where thou dwellest"; and in the five other churches in every instance it is, "I know thy works." The commendations, therefore, came from Him whose eyes are as a flame of fire, and who had searched them through and through. Commendation from such a source is commendation indeed.

Then there is the "but" of Condemnation. "But I have this against thee." It is more important for us to know our faults than our excellences. "Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and

lead me in the way everlasting. ¹ There is no “but” in the case of the church of Smyrna and that of Philadelphia; while throughout it is “but” in the case of the church of Laodicea.

The next is a Call, showing that the message is not simply for those then and there addressed, but for every one to whom it comes. “He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” In the first three of the letters this call is placed before the promise; and in the last four the order is reversed.

Lastly comes the Counsel, with a Promise or Reward attached. “I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich,” ² or some other priceless blessing. And in every case—in all the seven letters—the blessing is “to him that overcometh.” This is one of the greatest words in all these Epistles. There is such a thing as the triumphant, victorious Christian life. Let us stop our repining and our despondency. “Why should the children of a king go mourning all their days?” Supply the Scriptural conditions, and the results are sure to follow. Die to the past—“If I have done

¹ Ps. 139. 23, 24.

² Rev. 3. 18.

iniquity, I will do it no more." Die to self—"Not I, but Christ." Die to the world—"This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." And at last we shall die to death itself, "O death, where is thy sting?" We shall rise to all the life of God.

Let us notice, too, the wondrous scope of the promises in these successive epistles.

Ephesus! "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." The imagery here is from the Garden of Eden.

Smyrna! The overcoming one "shall not be hurt of the second death." The representation here is based upon the Fall.

Pergamum! To the overcoming one is given "the white stone and the hidden manna." We are now in the wilderness with Israel, on the march from Egypt to Canaan.

Thyatira! "Power over the nations." This brings us to the kingdom at the highest point of Jewish history, the palmy days of Solomon, the type of that coming time when a greater than Solomon shall reign from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth, as set forth in the second Psalm. If we are to advance higher,

the material must dissolve into the spiritual, and the type must pass on to the fulfilment. So that the next stage will be beyond the Millennium.

Sardis ! The overcoming one enters upon the blessings of the Judgment Day, is enrolled a citizen in the Book of Life, and clothed in garments of spotless purity.

Philadelphia ! As we go beyond the Judgment we enter into companionship with the glorified. Therefore the overcoming ones pass on and enter into the heavenly city where " they shall go no more out." And now the greatest of all the blessings comes last.

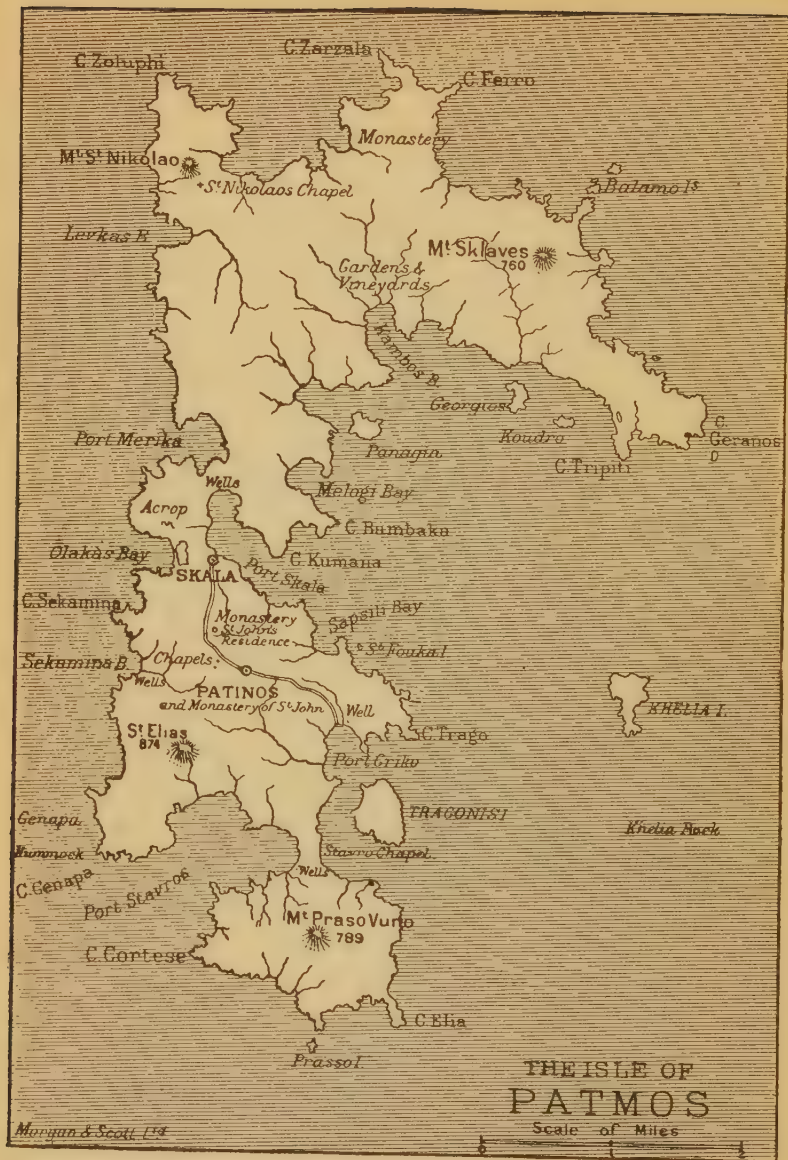
Laodicea ! After entering the city, those who overcome shall have the fullest fellowship with God and Christ. It shall be granted them " to sit down with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with My Father in His throne." Beyond this we cannot go. Higher than this we cannot rise.

Thus the descriptions of the rewards start with the Eden below whence man fell, sweep on through human history, and never cease until they conclude with the restored fellowship of the Eden that is above. That which was lost in Paradise is at last regained in Christ.

The Seer and the Vision

"I, John, your brother and fellow-sharer in the affliction and kingdom and steadfastness *that are* in Jesus, was in the isle called Patmos on account of the word of God and the witness of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a great voice as of a trumpet saying, What thou seest, write in a book, and send to the seven churches ; to Ephesus, and to Smyrna, and to Pergamum, and to Thyatira, and to Sardis, and to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea. And I turned about to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned, I saw seven golden lampstands ; and in the midst of the lampstands one like unto a son of man, clothed with a garment reaching down to the foot, and girded about at the breasts with a golden girdle. But his head and hair were white as white wool, *as white* as snow ; and his eyes were as a flame of fire ; and his feet like to burnished brass, as if refined in a furnace ; and his voice as the voice of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars ; and out of his mouth a sharp two-edged sword went forth ; and his countenance was as the sun shining in his strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as one dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying, Fear not ; I am the First and the Last, and the Living One ; and I became dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. Write, therefore, the things which thou sawest, and the things which are, and the things which are about to take place after these things ; the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest on my right hand and the seven golden lampstands : the seven stars are angels of the seven churches ; and the seven lampstands are the seven churches."

Rev. i. 9-20.



INTRODUCTION

Section II.—The Seer and the Vision

IT was well on in the afternoon of a spring day that our steamer slowly passed the Isle of Patmos. We were on our way northward to Smyrna, and thence on to Constantinople. As if to add special appropriateness to the occasion, with us, too, it was "the Lord's Day." The quiet of a Sabbath hush rested on the company of voyagers who had just bidden farewell to the sacred scenes of the Holy Land. The day was a perfect one. Not a cloud rested on the peaceful sky that brooded over us, nor was there the ripple of a wave on the indescribable blue of that wondrous sea. Were it not for the throb and jar of the machinery, we might almost have supposed that the ship was at a standstill.

Seated under the awning, with our Bibles open, the book of Revelation was read while the eye passed constantly from the printed page westward to the rocky shore where the

things "which are written in this book" had taken place. It was an experience never to be forgotten. Immediately we had passed the island, the sun, like a great ball of fire, gradually approached its setting. A sunset at sea is always impressive, and that evening we observed it with peculiar interest, daring scarcely to breathe. At last the rim touched the waters, and instantly the whole Aegean blazed forth into great shimmering pathways of golden splendour extending from our ship outward to the furthest edge of the distant horizon. Yes, we saw it! "the sea of glass mingled with fire."¹

Patmos is not a large island. It is only some ten miles long from north to south, but so deeply indented are its shores that the coast-line is thirty-seven miles in length. Its shape has been curiously compared to "a horse's head and neck, the nose pointing eastward."² It is of volcanic origin. The island gathers into three main mountain masses of brown rock, bare, jagged, desolate, its highest summit attaining a height of about 950 feet. Its pagan insignificance is indicated by the fact that it is referred to only thrice in classical literature,

¹ Rev. 15. 2.

² Hastings' "Dictionary."

and then receives but the barest incidental mention. As if unknown to the world even at the time of the Apocalypse, John speaks of it as "the isle called Patmos."

But greatness does not depend upon bulk. Once in our world's history the curtains parted from before that "lone rocky isle of the sea," and disclosed the last white-haired survivor of the Apostolic band walking along its heights with his glorified Lord, and then slowly the curtains closed again. It was enough. We would not part with this one vision for half the history of the world. No island on our planet after this can even begin to compare with it for interest. Down to the end of time it will occupy a leading place in immortal story, and the heart of the world will ever beat faster because of the unveiling of the unseen that was there revealed.

According to Jerome, the period of the Apostle's exile at Patmos was about eighteen months, when he was released under the Emperor Nerva. One wonders whether the imagery of Revelation was not coloured by local surroundings. Above John's head was outspread that broad expanse of eastern sky, sometimes darkened with tempest, sometimes veined

with "lightnings," sometimes rent with "thunders," sometimes swept with "hail," sometimes cheered with "a rainbow" resting on the brow of the receding storm; sometimes again piled up in castled greatness against the sky there arose a "great white cloud." Did John dip his pen in colours borrowed from natural objects when such find mention in his book?

Standing on the highest summit now called Mount Elias he looked out on a great sea studded with islands; and islands appear, too, here in this revelation. Is there any suggestion of the sandy beach down yonder when he writes of one that "stood upon the sand of the sea?"¹ The throb and beat and sweep of the sea surged around his island prison. Is there any relation between this and the mention of the sea twenty-six times in these pages? Forty miles away was the main coast of Asia Minor; and sixty miles to the north-east, beneath those distant blue mountains, was Ephesus, where his home lay, and where his loved ones dwelt, from whom he was now exiled. Was it with any reference to this estranging and dividing waste of waters that

¹ Rev. 13. 1.

he looked forward wistfully to a blessed heavenly reunion, when there should be “no more sea” to divide him from those he loved? One cannot help recognizing the touch of local feeling and influence.

And so in thought we land to-day in Patmos. “Island of the seven hills! island of the seven letters! island of the seven golden candlesticks! island of the seven stars! island of the seven lamps of fire! island of the seven spirits! island of the seven seals! island of the seven trumpets! island of the seven angels! island of the seven vials! island of the seven kings!” What marvels here confront us!

Our subject falls into two broad, general sections. We have (1) The Seer and his Preparation; (2) The Vision and its Instruction.

I. The Seer and his Preparation.

John beheld Christ in His glory. But in order to our seeing there is a preparation needed first in ourselves.

1. We cannot “see” if we are preoccupied. Much depends on our attitude of mind. On one occasion our Lord was delivering a marvellous discourse east in Perea, and thronging thousands clustered around Him and hung upon

His precious words. He was speaking of the necessity of being true and real, genuine and sincere, in all our religious professions. Sooner or later what is within must be made manifest. He was assuring them that if the inner life is what it should be before God, there is absolutely nothing to be feared. He who cares for sparrows, and counts the hairs of our head, will protect His people, and their names shall be confessed before the very angels of heaven. But there was one in that throng who was blind and deaf to all that was going on. During the whole time that Jesus was speaking, his thoughts were off on a miserable piece of property that his father had left and his brother was claiming. We can imagine him raising his hand and making every sort of demonstration to attract Christ's attention. At last his impatience broke through all restraints, and he pressed forward and rudely interrupted Jesus in the midst of His discourse.

“Teacher,” he excitedly exclaimed, “bid my brother divide the inheritance with me!”¹ He was in the audience, but he was as oblivious to that glorious message as if he were dead or

¹ Luke 12. 13.

living in a distant desert. While others were made rich for eternity, this unhappy man returned home poor even for time. A sower went out to sow. Some of the seed fell on the hard, beaten wayside, where it rattled on the surface as on a stone pavement, not leaving behind the slightest dint of impression. Then the birds came and devoured the seed. None but the sower would have known on the morrow that any grain had ever fallen there. Again, the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches may choke the Word and make it unfruitful.

An aged man on his deathbed confessed to his minister in tones of despair that for years he had not listened to a sermon, although none was more constant and punctual in attendance upon the means of grace than he. He had formed the habit of thinking only of his business affairs during the solemn hours of worship. Now that he was about to part with all his earthly possessions, he found that his soul's interests were neglected. Pour water into a vessel that is already filled, and it will simply run over and waste.

To one,

A primrose by a river's brim
A yellow primrose was to him,
And it was nothing more.

To another,

The meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

It depends on the beholder. What we see is determined by the spirit in which we look.

2. We cannot "see" spiritual things if we are unconverted. "Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged."¹ Again we read, "Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes."² The mightiest facts in human history are those of which worldlings know nothing.

What can be more pathetic than a scholar who professes to deal with Christianity, and yet has no personal experience of its power? It is as though you left half the figures out of a mathematical problem and yet tried to find a correct solution. Those who look at a cathedral's windows from the outside see them but dark, dull, leaden, without attraction or beauty. Those who are within and gazing through these same

¹ 1 Cor. 2. 14.

² Matt. 11. 25.

windows, see them shining with glory and filled with angels. An unregenerate learning is a stranger to the inner life of our blessed faith. Having eyes it sees not ; having ears it hears not. Its inductions are pitiably lame and defective.

Observe how three men approach the Bible. One of them does it in the spirit of cavil and fault-finding. He is an unbeliever, and the Book's inner meaning becomes dumb and silent before him ; he is looking out upon an arid waste. Another man approaches the Bible in the spirit of a Pharisee. He resents the appalling colours in which it portrays the tragedy of sin, as being so terrible that it can only be washed out by atoning blood. He refuses to accept the teaching of the Scriptures, and goes forth proclaiming his own self-righteousness. The third approaches the Bible as a sincere seeker after truth, determines to test its claims for himself, acts upon its teachings, follows its instructions, obeys its precepts ; and lo ! the Book blazes out with heavenly splendour, and God comes and walks and talks with him throughout all its blessed pages from first to last. He has willed to do God's will, and he knows of the teaching.

And this is sound philosophy. Experience is at one and the same time the true source of spiritual insight and the great interpreter. A man may be able to analyze the poems of Browning; but if he has not the spirit of poetry in himself, he will miss their beauty. Poetry alone can appreciate poetry; art alone can recognize art; love alone can understand love; spirit alone can meet Spirit; suffering alone can sympathize with suffering; the pure in heart alone can see God. In order to see the vision, the eyes of our heart must be enlightened.

3. We cannot "see" God's special revealings if we are not Spirit-filled. There are some things that all believers have in common; but beyond these there are "greater things" into possession of which only some enter. Not all the disciples went up into the Mount of Transfiguration—only the elect spirits who were prepared for what was to follow. In wireless telegraphy the receiver must be attuned to the transmitter, or there is no message. Our spirits must be in harmony with God's Spirit, or we shall hear no voice and see no vision. It was because John was "in the Spirit on the Lord's Day" that he saw and heard and felt.

One of the ominous perils of the age is the growing disregard of this sacred day. This bodes only evil for the future. “ No free state without religion ; no religion without worship ; and no worship without a Sabbath.” ¹

Let us draw even nearer. There is a Sabbath on the outer calendar of the year, and there is an inner sabbath of the soul. The day may be correctly observed externally, while the spirit within is entirely secular. Like a cold mist from the sea, the things of the week crowd in upon our Sabbaths and our devotions. “ The world is too much with us.” Let us give this day wholly to God. Turn the key upon thoughts of office and factory, of school and secular vocation. “ Thus far shalt thou come and no further.” There are higher interests that now demand attention.

Begin the day with God. Keep tryst with the risen Christ. “ O Jehovah, in the morning shalt Thou hear my voice ; in the morning will I order my prayer unto Thee, and will keep watch.” ² Let us gather our loved ones around the family altar ; read a portion of the Word, and let the whole household bow in prayer.

¹ Saying of Montalembert.

² Ps. 5. 3. (R.V.)

We are together now, but parting days will surely come. Let the impression received from the home be a benediction that will follow each member throughout life. In this spirit let us approach the duties which lie before us during the day, and let us not forget to close it with our Lord.

On Patmos John was shut out from the world, but he was also shut in with God. He honoured the day whereon Christ arose from the dead, and Christ honoured him. He kept the day, and the day kept him. He was prepared for the vision, and then the vision was prepared for him. His soul was attuned to heavenly things. May this be true of us !

II. The Vision and its Instruction.

Here is the key to the whole book of Revelation. The Vision stands in the forefront. What shall be the method of our study ? We would avoid mere fanciful or one-sided interpretations. To apprehend the true teaching of this visit of Christ to John on Patmos, it will be necessary for us to approach our study by the historic method through the light of other scriptures. When God had something important to impart in tabernacle or temple, a trumpet was blown ; and this was the signal for the congregation to

assemble.¹ The "great voice as of a trumpet" was at once recognized as the Divine summons to draw near.

The Apocalypse is now to be unfolded. The general appearance of Him whom John saw was that of the human form. He was "like unto a son of man." The long flowing garment down to the feet belonged alike to priest and king. It was a priestly raiment like "the robe of the Ephod" Aaron wore,² and the rich apparel with which Joshua the high priest was attired.³ It was also a kingly investiture. When Eliakim was raised to his high office, he was clothed in raiment of royalty; and in Isaiah's magnificent vision he saw the Lord sitting as a king upon a throne, while "his train filled the temple."⁴ So the golden girdle (not about the loins for service, but) about the breasts, is associated with the majesty and the affection, belonging both to the priestly and the regal office. The head and the hair white as wool or snow is a direct parallel from Daniel regarding "the Ancient of Days."⁵ The eyes of flaming fire, and the feet of burnished brass,

¹ Num. 10. 2 and Joel 2. 15.

² Ex. 28. 31.

³ Zech. 3. 4.

⁴ Isa. 6. 1.

⁵ Dan. 7. 9.

and the multitudinous voice are taken also almost verbally from a sublime vision in Daniel.¹ The face shining as the sun in Revelation follows directly from our Lord's transfiguration, which John beheld in the holy mount.² The imagery of the two-edged sword is found in Isaiah.³ The seven golden lampstands take us back to the Holy Place with its seven lamps, but with a difference. In the Old Testament, the lamps were branches from one central stem; but in the New Testament, each lampstand is apart, and our Lord is in the midst. Among the Jews there was unity in their religion in the midst of diversity; but in the Christian Church there is diversity in the midst of unity. Each golden lampstand stood separate; and yet one lampstand resembled the other, and all the seven were bound together in the symbolism of complete unity.

Comparing the seven pastors to seven stars carries us again to the book of Daniel, where we are told that the wise teachers who turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever.⁴ The Hebrew mind was too practical for a merely pictorial representation. It lost sight

¹ Dan. 10. 6.

² Matt. 17. 2.

³ Isa. 49. 2.

⁴ Dan. 12. 3.

of form in the reality that lay behind it ; hence the sublimity and power of the picture.

This description of the Christ comes, therefore, to us enriched with the wealth and advantage of Scriptural references, and this gives us the true interpretation. The Ancient of Days with hair white as snow teaches us the eternity and the purity of Him who was also "like unto a son of man." The eyes of flame proclaim His omniscience ; the feet of brass His authority and power ; the sunlike countenance His dazzling glory ; the sharp two-edged sword the piercing and dividing character of the message that proceeds from His mouth. The voice "like the voice of many waters" teaches that, although the voices of the universe may be vast and diversified and distant as those of the sea, yet all these resolve themselves into one great voice, and that voice is His.

Now, when we gather up the teaching of the whole scene we find that we have here a matchless description of our Lord in His humanity, His deity, His attributes. We have Him also in His three-fold office—the Prophet who teaches, the Priest who intercedes, the King who rules.

Let us now turn our thoughts for a moment from the past to the future. We are about to enter upon the study of the Epistles sent to the seven churches. Observe how the different parts of this description of our Lord in the first chapter are used in the introduction of the seven letters to the seven churches. He that hath the seven stars and the seven golden lamp-stands is the One who is presented to the mother church in Ephesus. The One who was dead and yet lives draws near to the sorrowing church in Smyrna. The two-edged sword is for the church in imperial Pergamum. Eyes of flame and feet of burnished brass are for the distracted church in Thyatira. The seven stars and the seven life-giving Spirits of God are the remedy for the deadness of the church in Sardis. The key that "openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth," will throw open new doors for the enterprising church in Philadelphia. The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, will testify against the indifference in the church in Laodicea.

Thus the character in which the Master draws near and speaks to each of the churches is taken from the introductory vision. So intimate is the

relationship between them that the order might be reversed, and the description of Christ in the first chapter could almost be reconstructed out of the various sections and parts with which the letters in the second and third chapters begin. This will appear more fully in subsequent pages.

The same thought also projects itself throughout the whole book. We may know what is coming in the remaining chapters. We are to have a record of the church in its conflict with evil right through the coming centuries and on to the glorious consummation. Through it all and over it all Christ is to be the great Prophet, teaching the world with a voice that is authoritative and commanding. He is to be the exalted High Priest, mighty to save and strong to deliver. He is to be the Almighty King, having all power in heaven and on earth, ruling amid the passions of men and destroying the works of darkness, until at last the beast and the false prophet and the devil are overthrown, and the kingdoms of this world shall become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. So that Christ is the Alpha and the Omega of the book of Revelation, aye, and all the intervening letters, too. He is the All in All.

The result to John himself was twofold :

1. There was a sense of sacred awe. "And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as one dead." He was prostrated into the very dust. This is always the result of a vision of God. When Isaiah saw the Lord in the temple, he cried out, "Woe is me ! for I am undone : because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips ; for mine eyes have seen the King, Jehovah of Hosts." ¹ When Ezekiel beheld the glory of Jehovah, he fell upon his face.² When the three disciples saw the transfigured Christ, they fell on their faces and were sore afraid.³

Exclude all light from a room, and nothing can be seen of what it contains. Let a little light in, and the larger objects will dimly appear. Let in more light, and the smaller objects can be seen. Flood the room with light, and you can see the very motes that float in the sunbeams. The more we know of God, the more we shall see of our own unworthiness, and the more deeply shall we be humbled on account of our sins. When reverence is gone, there is but little left. We need reverence of spirit, reverence even of

¹ Isa. 6. 5.

² Ezek. 1. 28.

³ Matt. 17. 6.

form, reverence in God's house, holy awe as we draw near the Divine presence. A sense of deep solemnity should mark all our worship. "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."¹ The greatness of any life is measured by the length and breadth of the holy ground that it contains. Sincerity of heart should accompany our utterance of praise. More place should be given to such thoughtful song as

Holy and reverend is the name
Of our exalted King.

Oh to catch the strain which the Israelitish people heard chanted in the temple, and which John afterwards heard echoed beside the crystal sea: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts." Trees cannot be planted in the clouds; neither can strong Christian characters be developed except as they are first deeply rooted in a profound sense of the majesty and purity of God.

2. The second result was encouragement. "He laid his right hand upon me, saying, Fear not!" We need the encouraging note. Whatever is going on in the world to-day, and however marshalled the forces of evil may be, the

¹ Ex. 3. 5.

Christian can afford to "Greet the future with a cheer." "God's in His heaven"; and while all is not yet well with the world, the ages are in His hands and the ultimate issue is assured. How marvellously He is moving among the nations of the earth at the present time! The cry a century ago was for fields in which missionaries might be permitted to labour. In answer to this prayer, God caused nation after nation to throw open its gates, and now the whole world is ripe and perishing for lack of reapers to go forth and bind the golden sheaves. Great awakenings seem to anticipate the approach of the time when nations shall be born unto God in a day. "Fear not!"

The magnificence and grandeur of the remainder of this statement cannot be estimated. "I am the first and the last and the living One; and I became dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore; and I have the keys of death and of Hades."

A visitor to the great galleries of Europe cannot fail to have noticed that Art stops for the most part at the tomb of Christ. We have paintings of the birth, the childhood, the life, the trial, the tragedy; and there the brush of the

artist falters while Christ goes on. So also must we. If we are reconciled by His death, be it ever remembered also that we are saved by His life. He became dead, but, blessed be God, He is alive for evermore ! The Christ of history is also the Christ of the ages. The Man of Sorrows has passed on to His coronal. This verse links us with the narrative of Christ's life below, and then weaves that narrative into the fabrics of eternity. It will not do to stop at the tomb.

W. E. Geil¹ relates that a hard, reckless man stood gazing intently at Rubens' great masterpiece, "The Descent from the Cross," in the dim light of the old Gothic Cathedral of Nôtre Dame in Antwerp. The poor man looked at the painting, and as he looked, he fell upon his knees before it and wept. Time passed, and he knew it not ; and at length the twilight of evening began to settle over the Belgian city, but there he remained oblivious, kneeling, weeping, enthralled. At length a verger came, and laying a kindly hand upon his shoulder, found him trembling with emotion and said, "Sir, you must go out now ; we must close the Cathedral."

¹ "Patmos," by Geil, p. 144.

With a look of amazement the rough man turned his face, wet with tears, and exclaimed, "I cannot go, sir, till they let Him down."

O child of God, linger in the evening shadows of Calvary until they get Him down from the cross. Abide beside the tomb until in the twilight of the morning He comes forth and the grave is left behind for ever empty. Tarry on the brow of Olivet until you see Him rise, and a cloudy chariot bear Him home. Then go, in imagination, to visit Patmos, and there worship the risen, the ascended, the glorified Christ.

Christ's Letter to the Church at Ephesus

The Letter of the Lord Jesus,
Our Risen, Ascended and Glorified
Prophet, Priest and King.

Sent by His servant John.

“To the Angel of the
CHURCH IN EPHESUS

Write :—

These things saith he who holdeth fast the seven stars in his right hand, he who walketh to and fro in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. I know thy works, and thy weariness and thy steadfastness ; and that thou canst not bear evil men ; and didst try those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and didst find them false ; and hast steadfastness, and didst bear for my name's sake and hast not grown weary. But I have against thee, this, that thou didst leave thy first love. Remember, therefore, whence thou hast fallen, and repent, and do the first works ; or else I am coming to thee and will remove thy lampstand out of its place if thou repent not. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.”

The Isle called Patmos.

Rev. 2. 1-7.



01127021

Ephesus.

Looking westward towards the sea. The theatre in the foreground seated 50,000 people. "They rushed with one accord into the theatre" (Acts xix. 29).

CHAPTER I

Ephesus

AFTER passing Patmos, pursuing our journey, we landed at Smyrna. Two hours later we arrived at a small station named Ayassoluk, forty-eight miles distant by rail from Smyrna.¹ Around the station there was a squalid little village, and beyond this there lay a widespread scene of confused ruins, "the quiet of a vast cemetery of the ancient days."² This is all that is now left of what was once the magnificent city of Ephesus. The time spent in exploring the site and ruins of that place will ever be memorable.

Think of a low valley extending westward to the Aegean sea. On the northern side of the valley is the lofty mountain range of Gallesion; on the southern side of the valley the parallel range of Koressos; and to the east rise up, layer on layer, the mountains of Asia Minor. These

¹ Forty miles in a direct line.

² Moule, "Ephesians," p. 4.

last are visible from Patmos. Through the valley flows westward to the sea the small meandering river Cayster. The city clung chiefly to the southern side of the valley along the slopes of Mount Koressos. The harbour which once led to the city is now filled up, and the sea is over six miles distant.

Let us now pause and recall briefly the history of its past. Over a thousand years prior to the Christian era, Greek colonists from Athens came here and founded a joint city with Asiatic natives; after the conquest of Asia by Alexander in 335 B.C. it became more pronouncedly Greek: but when it became a Roman Province in 133 B.C. it rose to the highest eminence, so that Ephesus was called "The Light of Asia."

When was Christianity introduced into Ephesus? On the Day of Pentecost there were present in Jerusalem Jews from Pontus and Asia. Did any of them return converted and tell others the story? Be this as it may, the inspiring record of the founding of this great church is given in most interesting detail in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth chapters of Acts. Apollos, the eloquent Alexandrian, who was mighty in the Scriptures, fervently preached the Gospel in

Ephesus first. He was followed by Paul, who found "about twelve men" there who had never heard of the Holy Spirit, having been baptized only with the baptism of John. For three months the Apostle spoke boldly in the synagogue, and then, retiring before opposition, he separated the disciples from that assemblage, and taught daily for two whole years in the school of a certain man named Tyrannus.

Speaking of his Ephesian ministry, he afterward declared that for the space of three years he ceased not "to admonish every one night and day with tears"; teaching publicly and from house to house—not philosophy, not ritualism, not the dignity of human nature, but—the plain, and from a latter-day standpoint old-fashioned but universally needed doctrines of "repentance toward God, and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ." Paul was in Ephesus during the years 54, 55 and 56. It was the longest period that he had ever given to any one place. The effect of his teaching was simply overwhelming. Astounding wonders accompanied the preaching of the word. Magicians were rebuked. So deeply was the city moved that magical books to the value of fifty thousand

pieces of silver were publicly burned, and the very temple of Diana, "whom all Asia and the civilized world worshipped," was in danger of being overthrown. This temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, and fragments of its ruins can still be seen. Then came the infuriated mob that filled the theatre, whose terraced seats can yet be seen on the western side of Mount Pion open to the sky. There the excited throngs shouted themselves hoarse, crying, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." "So mightily grew the word of the Lord and prevailed."

In the year 57 we have that touching farewell of Paul to the elders of the church which sounds like a distant echo of the letter in Revelation. "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock of which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers." The greatness of this church is further shown in the Epistle that Paul wrote to it during his first imprisonment, four years later, in the year 61,¹ which is perhaps [the profoundest of all his letters. And the last words that came from Paul's pen—that second Epistle to Timothy, written in the year 68, and in which he says, "I have fought the good fight,

¹ "Expositor's Bible," Vol. VI, p. 9.

I have finished my course, I have kept the faith ; henceforth the crown ”—were thus written to the youthful pastor of the church at Ephesus.

The closing years of John the beloved were also spent there, and his ashes lie on one of these neighbouring hills. So that Apollos prepared the soil, Paul planted it, Timothy cultivated it, John watered it, and God gave the increase. How great must have been that church which had been successively ministered to by these mighty men of God !

And now when the church had been established about forty years, there came to it this wonderful letter from the glorified Christ. We notice :—

I. The *Character* in which our Lord introduced Himself. The seven stars and the seven lampstands are taken from the precious vision in the first chapter at verse 13 and again at verse 20. But why is Christ thus presented ? The reason is manifest. Just as Ephesus was the metropolitan city of all Asia, and stood for Asia and represented it, so was it also with the church there. It was the great central church of the country, the parent church of the Province. It was from Ephesus that “ all they that dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord,

both Jews and Greeks.”¹ When a circular letter was written for the Asiatic churches, Paul addressed his Epistle “To Ephesus” as representing the whole.

Hence the Master is revealed to this representative church as having the seven stars and the seven lampstands. No other description could possibly be so appropriate and beautiful. But there is a progression of thought. In the first chapter He “has” seven stars; but in the second chapter He “holds them fast.” This is a stronger word. One writer thinks that “in the image before the seer, the seven stars probably appear as a chain of glittering jewels hanging from the hand of Christ.” Look at their location on a map, and you cannot fail to observe how like a chain with stars was this circle of the seven churches. Be this as it may, I may “have” a thing and lose it; but that to which I “hold fast,” cannot be taken away. Unspeakably safe and precious is the keeping of a true servant of Jesus Christ. He is held like a bright shining star, secure in the grasp of omnipotent love. None can ever pluck him out thence or harm him there. Advance-

¹ Acts 19. 10.

ment also pertains to the churches. In the first chapter He is simply in the midst of the seven lampstands; but in the second chapter He is "walking to and fro" among them, constantly going up and down in their midst, so that nothing can escape His notice.

II. *Commendation.* In the letter to Ephesus this is fuller than that in any of the other six. The Christians here are commended for seven great excellences. Four of these are from within, and three are from without. Works, weariness, patience, steadfastness: these belong to the inner life of the church working outward. Then, on the other hand, its intolerance of evil men and false apostles and the hateful deeds of the Nicolaitans, relate to that which was without, and which was striving to work inward and damage the church. These believers both grew strong, and also resisted.

(a) I know thy "works." The church at Ephesus was not at ease in Zion, not content with past achievement; it was still busy and active, and pushing and aggressive.

(b) And thy "weariness." The original is stronger than the word "toil." It is better to render it "weariness," as in 2 Corinthians

11. 27, “in weariness and painfulness.” The word comes from a root which signifies to smite, as when one cuts down great forest trees, and points to the fatigue which follows from such labour. They had not only worked, but worked to their utmost; they had toiled even to the point of exhaustion.

(c) And thy “steadfastness.” This term is used twice in this letter, viz., in verses 2 and 3, showing that this was a marked feature in the temper of the church. The expression in the New Testament is defined as “the characteristic of a man who is unswerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings.”¹ They had stood the test. They were true to the King at any cost.

(d) And thou hast not “grown weary.” There is a beautiful touch here that does not appear in the ordinary translation. The verb that we render “grown weary” is the root of the noun that has just been translated “weariness.”² It is as if the Master said, “Thou hast worked to the furthest limit, but it was no fatigue to thee. Since it was in My service, thou

¹ Thayer.

² See κόπος and κόπιάω.

didst rejoice; and though wearied, thou wast not weary. Toil for Me has been no toil; it has been thy joy." What exquisite commendation this is! Then came the three resisting qualities of the church:

(a) "Thou canst not bear evil men." In so far as we give sympathy to that which is evil, we become partners in the evil itself, and in its guilt and shame. The record of the church was clean. Its voice was clear and unmistakable. It stood forth a mighty bulwark for righteousness.

(b) It had no sympathy with evil teaching. "Thou didst try them that call themselves apostles and they are not, and didst find them false." Erroneous teaching is the poisonous seed out of which false conduct grows. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." There was no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.

(c) They resisted pernicious influences. They "hated the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate." These Nicolaitans are mentioned twice in these seven letters, here and in Pergamum. Who were they? There has been much speculation on this subject; but we have

a few facts which are sufficient for our present purpose. A sect arose during the second century bearing this name. Irenaeus speaks of them as living "lives of unrestrained indulgence"; Clement of Alexandria as "buried in the mire of vice"; and Ignatius as "impure lovers of pleasure."¹ We have evidently in Ephesus and Pergamum beginnings of this injurious body.

Over forty years prior to this time the great danger of the Christian church was from Judaizing teachers who sought to bring it back under bondage to ceremonial law; and Paul fought some of his sturdiest battles to emancipate the church from this thralldom and bring it forth into the glorious liberty wherewith Christ sets His people free. Now the pendulum swings to the opposite direction, and we have another class who wish to throw off all the restraints of the moral law. The one party would Judaize, and the other party would heathenize the church. The one came from Hebrew sources, and the other from pagan. Both these tendencies arose inevitably as Christianity touched Judaism on the one side and heathenism

¹ Hastings' "Bible Dictionary."

on the other. Paul in his Epistles combats the one evil earlier in the century, and John in Revelation combats the other later.

Nor are these tendencies by any means unknown to-day. If we have to contend against formalism on the one hand, we are beset with even greater danger from undue licence on the other. "Free from the law, oh, happy condition" is only half a truth. We are free indeed from the penalties and consequences of sin through the death on the cross ; but just because of this, in a sense far more overwhelming than ever, we are "under law to Christ."¹ This, no doubt, is what the hymn means. Now, pause for a moment. Was there ever a more inspiring description of a splendid church ? Seven is the symbol of perfectness ; and these seven commended qualities make it ideal. Hold up Ephesus before the world as a model ! But He whose eyes are as a flame of fire is walking among His churches.

III. There is *Condemnation*. "Thou didst leave thy first love." The same word which is here rendered "leave"² is applied to divorce

¹ 1 Cor. 9. 21.

² ἀφίημι. See 1 Corinthians 7. 11, 13.

where the man of that time dismissed the wife whom he had ceased to love. How terrible that such a term could ever be used of the relation of a soul to God! This church was commencing to divorce from her heart her blessed Saviour. "It had *begun* to lose its spiritual stimulus. It had *begun* to substitute self for Christ, pride for humility. It had *begun* to change principle into routine, and to make the religious life a perfunctory life. The beginning was the great departure; all else would be but natural sequence."¹ The word "somewhat" in the old version is in italics, and is not in the original. Its use makes it appear as though this was an inconsequent or a trifling matter. Instead of this it was everything. The very foundations were beginning to give way; and if this danger were not removed, the whole structure must soon topple down and crumble to the ground. Let us read it thus: "I have against thee this, that thou didst leave thy first love." While the top of the tree was flourishing, a dread decay had smitten the base of the trunk. Not yet perceptible without; but there

¹ "The Seven Churches of Asia," Howard Crosby, p. 24.

was a chill within, and a lowering of the temperature. The eye was not quite so keen; the step not quite so elastic; the heart did not beat quite so fast; the enthusiasm was not quite so great. There was a lowering of standards. O Ephesus, Ephesus, with thy great history and thy marvellous achievements, He who sees thee as thou really art, knows well thy condition! Thou art fallen. Thou hast left thy first love.

Then there are three priceless admonitions.

1. Remember. "Remember whence thou hast fallen." There is nothing that will awaken a holy discontent like the memory of departed joys. When God would bring back Israel from her sin, He constantly bids her remember the days of old. There is a hymn that has been excluded from some compilations, and that has yet a place and always will have a place in certain conditions of Christian experience.

Where is the blessedness I knew

When first I saw the Lord?

Where is the soul's refreshing view

Of Jesus and His word?

What peaceful hours I once enjoyed,

How sweet their memory still!

But they have left an aching void

The world can never fill.

2. Repent. This is one of the words that has become almost obsolete in our day; but it must be restored to its place in the teaching of the church. It is vital. There is no salvation without it. We have to confess and forsake our sins. We must loathe them. They have to become to us like the dead decaying body chained to the living man concerning which Paul cried out, "Oh, wretched man that I am; who shall deliver me from the body of this death!" Christ will never save any people in their sins: it is *from* their sins. There must be repentance toward God as well as faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

3. Reform. "Do thy first works." When Bunyan's Pilgrim lost his roll, he went back sorrowfully to the place where he had left it, and there it was found. Go right back and begin over again. You will find a loving, pardoning Lord at the very spot where He met you first. He will restore to you the years that the locusts have eaten.

IV. The *Call*. "He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches. We recognize the voice of the Master in this summons. We have heard Him speak words

like these before. On five occasions during His earthly ministry we meet the injunction, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear," so that these words come up like an echo from the past. I confess to surprise at an eminent writer ¹ applying the seven letters wholly and exclusively to the pastors of these seven churches, and not to the churches under their watchcare. Pastors, of course, belong to the churches, and are included with them. But they are more than that: they are also representatives of the churches. To apply these letters exclusively to pastors is to substitute imagination for exegesis. Seven times it is repeated in these letters that we have in them "what the Spirit is saying to the churches." "To the churches," then, were these messages sent through the pastors. Not alone to the particular church that is named; but to all churches everywhere in which similar conditions are found. Notice further. At the beginning of each letter it is Christ who speaks; and yet before you close it is the Spirit: thus teaching us that as the Father and the Son are one, even so also the Son and the Spirit are one. In the mystery of the Divine nature we have God in

¹ Dr. Alexander Whyte, in "Bible Characters."

three persons, blessed Trinity. How it becomes us reverently to heed when the Spirit is speaking to us !

V. *Counsel.* Overcome, and a great privilege shall be yours. "To him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God." In calling attention to the remarkable symmetry found in Revelation, it was Henry More who said "There never was a book penned with such artifice as this of the Apocalypse."¹

The seven letters begin, it is true, with descriptions taken from the vision of the glorified Christ whom John saw on the island of Patmos ; but this is not all. If the opening sentences of each epistle look backward, the closing promise always looks forward.

This "tree of life" that is growing in the midst of the Paradise of God—a description of it is given in the opening paragraph of the twenty-second chapter of Revelation.

The "second death" spoken of in the letter to Smyrna is explained in chapters twenty and twenty-one.

The "new name" mentioned in the letter

¹ Trench, p. 92.

to Pergamum is referred to in the fourteenth chapter.

The “morning star” of Thyatira shines resplendent in the sky of the closing chapter.

Of those clothed in the “white garments” of Sardis a full exposition is given in the seventh chapter.

The “New Jerusalem” spoken of in the letter to Philadelphia—a description of its gates, its walls, its streets, its worship, its inhabitants, will be found in chapter twenty-one.

How can the overcoming ones of Laodicea sit in yonder throne? This question is answered in the twelfth chapter.¹

Thus, if the roots of the second and third chapters go back to the first, their branches spread out and flourish throughout the remaining nineteen chapters.

Now, let us go back to the great promise of this epistle. Paradise is mentioned three times in the New Testament: once in connexion with the dying robber on the cross, once of the third heaven, and once here. It is where the tree of life grows. And in chapter twenty-two

¹ Trench, p. 132.

we are told that the tree of life is where the throne of God and the Lamb is ; where flows the river of the water of life ; where there is no more curse ; where they need no light of the sun, " for the Lord God shall give them light, and they shall reign for ever and ever."

The Nicolaitans would have the Christians of Ephesus partake of the poisonous fruits of sin, to taste which is death. How matchless then is the appropriateness of this proffered blessing ! Over against this evil is placed as a counter attraction the food that grows on the tree of life. Allurements to vice are to be cast aside, for God has infinitely better things. The husks upon which swine feed are to be rejected for the banquet in the Father's house. Those who turn away from the pleasures of sin will become partakers of heavenly joys.

Then, should this church fail to heed the message, how solemn the warning ! It takes its colouring from local conditions. Professor Ramsay calls Ephesus " The city of change " ; and adds that it " had experienced more vicissitudes than any city in Asia." ¹ Just as the word earthquake would have a peculiar dread to the people

¹ Ramsay, p. 10.

of a city recently destroyed through a seismic upheaval, so to be “ moved ” had a deep and solemn meaning to the people of Ephesus. “ I will move thy lampstand out of its place.”

Local experiences gave to this warning word a significance for Ephesus that it could have nowhere else. Did Ephesus repent? Did she heed this letter of the Christ? Did she return to her first love? When machinery is in motion, you can remove the power, and the momentum will cause the wheels to continue revolving so that for a time you might scarcely suspect that the propelling force had been taken away at all. But gradually, imperceptibly, the speed will begin to slacken, and it will continue to slacken more and more, until the momentum is exhausted, and then at length the wheels will stand still. So was it with the church at Ephesus.

In the year 107 Ignatius wrote a letter to this church that was full of praise and admiration. It seemed yet to be in all its pristine glory. But Ignatius did not see as deeply as the One whose eyes were as a flame of fire, and who was walking to and fro among the golden lampstands. In the year 431 a great Council was

held in Ephesus; but by this time the light of the church was beginning to grow dim. Its glory was commencing to fade away. Dr. Chandler summarizes the history of this city down to modern times in the following solemn words: "Consecrated, first of all, to the purposes of Idolatry, Ephesus next had Christian temples almost rivalling the pagan in splendour, wherein the image of the great Diana lay prostrate before the cross; after the lapse of some centuries, the religion of Jesus gave way to Mohammed, and the crescent glittered on the dome of the recently Christian church.

A few more score of years and Ephesus had not temple, cross, crescent, or city; but is a desolation, a dry land and wilderness."¹ God had removed its lampstand out of its place. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." He that spared not Ephesus shall not spare thee. Remember whence thou hast fallen. Repent and return to thy first love.

¹ Tait, p. 178.

Christ's Letter to the Church at Smyrna

The Letter of the Lord Jesus,
Our Risen, Ascended and Glorified
Prophet, Priest and King.

Sent by His servant John.

“And to the Angel of the
CHURCH IN SMYRNA

Write : —

These things saith the First and the Last who became dead and lived. I know thy affliction and poverty (but thou art rich), and the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and they are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Fear not the things which thou art about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried : and ye shall have affliction ten days. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches. He that overcometh shall in no wise be hurt of the second death.”

Rev. 2. 8-11.

The Isle called Patmos.



1870

Mount Pagos, with Castle. The cypress tree standing alone on the highest elevation a little to the right of the castle marks the reputed tomb of Polycarp.

CHAPTER II

Smyrna

SMYRNA is mentioned but twice in the Bible—once in the first, and once in the second chapter of Revelation. Founded by a colony from Greece more than a thousand years prior to the Christian era, it rose into eminence and flourished for fully four hundred years. It was one of the rival cities that claimed to be the birthplace of Homer; and “the blind old bard” was often represented on its coins.

About six hundred years before Christ, the city was totally destroyed by the Lydians; and for over three centuries it “lost its place in the list of Greek cities,” and disappeared from the page of history. Then it was refounded and restored by Lysimachus, and soon out-rivalled all its ancient greatness. So that of the city of Smyrna itself it has been said “that once it was dead and became alive again.” Built on an arm of the sea that runs some

thirty miles into the mainland, it became a great maritime power, and for three centuries was the sure and trusted colleague and friend of Rome. It prided itself on its loyalty. Cicero characterized Smyrna as "The city of our most faithful ally."

It is interesting to note that the only letter of the seven wherein the word "faithful" occurs is addressed to the church situated in a place so commended for its own faithfulness. If Smyrna was loyal to her monarch, this noble church was yet more loyal to her Lord.

It was not only a great city, but it was one of the most beautiful in the world. From the water's edge, it covered the slopes and sides of the hill on which it was built; while Mount Pagos, rising in circular form 450 feet higher, towered like a crown of glory above the whole. With pride this citadel was called "The golden crown of Smyrna." The word "Smyrna" signifies myrrh; and early writers were constantly speaking of its charms. But there was a far nobler crown than that which overlooked and adorned this ancient city. To the faithful ones below, suffering in the streets of this proud metropolis, there was reserved by the blessed Master the

crown of life. "Thus," as Dr. Ramsay has so forcibly pointed out, "the language of this letter takes much of its colouring from local conditions." ¹

But if Smyrna was fair, it was also full of sin. Drunkenness, revelling and other excesses were among its besetting vices; and the orgies at its great festivals were characterized as among "the most debasing and demoralizing spectacles which heathenism ever introduced." ² So that if in the city to the south we heard the shout of the excited throngs crying, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians," in this city by the sea it was, "Great is Cybele of the Smyrneans." Smyrna is to-day the crowning glory of the Levant, and the great commercial city of Asia Minor, with a population of over 300,000, of whom over 200,000 are Greeks. It is also the scene of active and aggressive missionary operations. The golden lampstand of Smyrna has never been removed; and although at times the light that shone forth from it flickered low indeed, and was very dim, yet it was never wholly extinguished.

We come next to the angel of the church.

¹ Ramsay, chap. 19, 20.

² Tait, p. 184.

Here we meet with a very interesting inquiry. The early Christians generally believed that this angel was none other than Polycarp, who suffered a glorious martyrdom in Smyrna in the year 155.¹ The argument stands thus : As this white-haired old hero was led on that memorable Saturday to the stake in the stadium (traces of whose ruins can yet be seen on the side of Mount Pagos), the Proconsul, touched by his venerable appearance, came to him and said, "Swear, and I will set thee free. Revile Christ." Polycarp's noble answer is known the world over :

"Fourscore and six years have I served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How, then, can I speak evil of my King who saved me ? "

This would date his conversion in the year 69, or about the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. Of course he was older than that; for this was when he became a Christian, and not the time of his birth. The book of Revelation was written, probably, in the year 95, or twenty-six years after he had given his heart to God, thus leaving ample time for him to

¹ Hastings' "Dictionary," and "Cambridge Bible" in loco.

rise to this important position. Tertullian expressly states that Polycarp was settled by John as the Bishop of Smyrna, and in the year 108, Ignatius found him in Smyrna at the head of the church. It gives a thrill of personal interest as we are led to conclude that in all probability it was Polycarp himself who was the angel of this church at the time this message came from the island of Patmos. Notice,

I. The *Character* in which the glorified Christ is introduced. It is twofold. He is presented as “the first and the last,” and also as the “one who became dead and lived”; not lived “again” after He died, but He continued to live through death. The expression “the first and the last” goes back to the first chapter, when the Seer fell awed at the feet of Him who laid His right hand upon him. It goes further back still to Isaiah, where it is found three times, and in every case it is predicated of God. In Isaiah 41. 4: “I Jehovah, the first, and with the last, I am He.” Isaiah 44. 6: “Thus saith Jehovah the king of Israel, and His Redeemer Jehovah of hosts, I am the first and the last, and beside Me there is no God.” Then again

Isaiah 48. 12: "Hearken unto Me, O Jacob, and Israel My called ; I am He ; I am the first, I also am the last." Moreover, we have that massive and complete statement in Revelation 22. 13: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

By the expression "the first," a beautiful passage in Isaiah makes it clear that He refers to the creation of the universe. Immediately after declaring that He is first, He adds: "Yea, My hand hath laid the foundation of the earth, and My right hand hath spread out the heavens: when I call unto them, they stand up together."¹ And then by "the last," He means after the heavens are no more. Now recall the Epistle to the Hebrews, where Psalm 102 is quoted, and applied as follows to the Son: "Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the works of Thy hands: they shall perish, but Thou continuest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a mantle shalt Thou roll them up, and they shall be changed; but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail."²

¹ Isa. 48. 13.

² Heb. 1. 10-12.

In this great title we have then, first, the essential Deity of Christ. "I am the first and the last; and beside Me there is no God." Secondly, we have His eternity. "I stood by its cradle, and saw the universe when it was born; and I shall stand by its bier when it dies and shall see it buried—an existence without beginning and without end. From everlasting to everlasting I am God." Thirdly, this brings before us, therefore, the absolute security of all those who make Him their refuge. They need have no fear of what men would do unto them. But this is not all. "I am He that became dead and lived." Here He links eternity with time.

The whole Gospel is gathered up in those two great words "death" and "resurrection." He died for our sins. He rose for our justification. I have redeemed thee; thy name is graven upon the palms of My hands. Thou art dear to Me as the apple of Mine eye. How touchingly appropriate is all this to the condition of the church at Smyrna! They were called upon to die for His sake. But I have passed through the dark valley, Christ replies, and I know it all. Moreover, I hold the keys, and am Lord of all that

dark domain. Nay, I am alive for evermore. So death will be to you only a transition into the life of glory which lies just beyond the dark portal. Therefore, "Fear not the things that thou art about to suffer." All above you the air is throbbing with the music of the resurrection morning. "First," "last," "dead," "lived." What marvellous words of encouragement and hope and blessedness! We have—

II. *Commendation.*

To Smyrna it is all commendation. There is not one word of censure or reproof. These saints had not left their first love like those of Ephesus. They had not grown tolerant of evil like those of Pergamum. They had no division in their ranks like those of Thyatira. They had not sunk down into lifeless disregard like those of Sardis. They were loyal to the Master as the great church in Philadelphia, but with this difference: that Philadelphia was called upon to serve, while Smyrna was asked to suffer; and it is easier to go forth and toil than it is to stand still and endure. They had not the nauseating indifference of those of Laodicea, who were neither one thing nor the other. True as steel, Smyrna had stood

erect for her risen Lord ; so that He who walks amid the golden lampstands, and whose piercing eyes, like flames of fire, penetrated into every recess and obscurity, yet saw no fault or flaw or falter in her life.

And she had done this in the face of the severest testings. The persecutions of Smyrna were twofold ; namely, present and future. First, we have those she was already going through—affliction, poverty, reviling ; and second, those that she was about to enter upon—imprisonment, trial, death. One storm was not yet over ; another storm was about to break forth. The intensity of the sufferings of this devoted people is shown in the strong words that are used. The term affliction is twice found in this letter ; once at the beginning, and again at the end of their persecutions. The word literally means to press or crush.¹ Like the clusters of the vintage, pressed in the winepress until all the blood of the grapes is crushed out of them ; like the wheat between the upper and nether stones of the mill, where the grain is ground into powder : so crushed and bleeding, so pressed and broken was this noble church

¹ θλίψις, from θλίβω.

by the cruel hand of relentless persecution. Secondly, "I know thy poverty"—literally, "thy beggary."¹ Those who had trampled them down beneath their feet had also stripped them of all their earthly possessions, and reduced them to a condition of abject, pitiable want. Nevertheless, because it was for the Master's sake, they took joyfully the spoiling of their goods.²

A further source of persecution was the revilings of those Jews who were of the synagogue of Satan. Like the Nicolaitans, Jews are twice mentioned in these letters; namely, once here, and once in the letter to Philadelphia. It is known that there were many Jews scattered throughout the Province of Asia at this time. For some reason they were specially hostile to the Christians. At the time of the martyrdom of Polycarp they distinguished themselves in their hatred. Although it was on their own Sabbath, they yet made themselves conspicuous in their zeal by gathering from the workshop and baths the fuel with which he was burned to death; and they showed their special malice when all was over by trying "to prevent the friends of the martyr from gathering up his

¹ πτωχεία.

² Heb. 10. 34.

bones for burial.”¹ They were false Jews, false to the faith of their fathers; and their place of worship, instead of being a temple of the living God, became a contradiction in terms. Filled with the spirit of hatred and cruelty and scorn and bitterness, it is labelled a very synagogue of Satan. Wherever God builds His church, across the way Satan will be found building his synagogue.

In this connexion we notice three startling expressions that we have in these letters. When the hostility came from the Jews, as in Smyrna and Philadelphia, the phrase that is used is “A synagogue of Satan.” When the hostility was enforced by the heathen, as in Pergamum, it is called “The throne of Satan.” When it came from a church divided among its members, as in the case of Thyatira, there we have “The depths of Satan.”

Now we are in a position to appreciate the meaning of the expression “I know.” Does it mean simply that the Master was omniscient, and that therefore He knew all about His church? This is true enough; but the word contains a deeper thought. Does it mean that He was

¹ Tait, p. 195.

omnipresent, walking perpetually amid the lamp-stands, and that therefore He was acquainted with what was taking place? True, but there is even more than this. Notice the parallel between the church and her Lord. They were hated and slandered by the Jews: so was He. They were impoverished: so was He—He had not where to lay His head; and at last His very garments were parted among His foes. They were crushed to death beneath their sufferings: beneath His sufferings our Lord sank into the tomb. It is, therefore, the “I know” of personal experience that we meet with here. Step by step He had actually trodden that way before. In all their afflictions He was afflicted. This surely is the “I know” of the merciful and gracious High Priest, who had been tempted in all points as they had been, and who could sympathize with and succour them. What tenderness He put into these blessed words! I know thy mockeries, thy poverty, thy life pressed out; through it all I have passed, and for thee I am making intercession before the throne, that thy faith fail not.¹

¹ G. Campbell Morgan's “First Century Message, p. 62.

Then observe the antithesis. Flashed over the scene, one brief parenthesis bathes the whole landscape in golden light. Just three words in the original, “But rich art thou.” “Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing all things; dying, and behold we live,”¹ “a spectacle to men and angels”!² We have here just the opposite of Laodicea. Of her the Master declared, “Thou sayest I am rich, and have gotten riches and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art the wretched one and miserable and poor and naked.” There is a wealth that is poverty, and there is a poverty that is true riches. “Pull down these barns and build greater.” “Thou foolish one, this night is thy soul required of thee.” “So is he that layeth up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”³

III. *Counsel.* We have finally a solemn charge and a blessed promise; and the promise is put negatively and positively. Negatively, the overcoming one shall in no wise be hurt of the second death: positively, I will give thee the crown of life. That man alone is rich who has

¹ 2 Cor. 6. 10.

² 1 Cor. 4. 9.

³ Luke 12. 21.

possessions which death cannot wrench from his grasp and scatter like chaff to the winds. The true believer is rich in the sense of pardon through the atoning blood, rich in faith in God, rich in the hope of the Gospel, rich in Christian experience, rich in answered prayer, rich in the graces of the Spirit, rich in an inheritance in that Kingdom that fadeth not away. "All things are yours."

What Lord Macaulay said of the Puritan is true of every real Christian: "For his sake empires had risen and flourished and decayed. For his sake the Almighty had proclaimed His will by the pen of the Evangelist, and the harp of the prophet. He had been wrested by no common deliverer from the grasp of no common foe. It was for him that the sun had been darkened, that the rocks had been rent, that the dead had risen, that all nature had shuddered at the sufferings of her expiring God." When this mortal life shall be dissolved, eternity with all its glories will remain the unmeasured heritage of the child of God. Let us now advance further.

In our time due attention is not paid to the life which is to come. We concentrate our thought

too much upon the present. This leads to materialism. Its philosophy is, “ Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.” Above all things let us be honest. Let us not evade or equivocate. Character tends to fixedness. Like gravitates to like. There are two destinies in the future. The time comes when he that is holy will remain holy still, and he that is filthy will continue filthy still.

Negatively, “ He that overcomes shall in no wise be hurt of the second death.” Here we have the parting of the ways, the solemn contrasting scenes. Just as there is a life beyond this life for the faithful, so there is a death beyond this death for the unbelieving.

The expression “ The second death ” is peculiar to Revelation, where it is mentioned three times : namely, in this letter to the church at Smyrna ; and in Revelation 20. 6, where those who have part in the first resurrection escape its power ; and in the close of the same chapter, ¹ where those whose names are not written in the book of life shall be cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death. We see at once why this solemn passage comes in

¹ Verses 14, 15.

at the close of this letter. We have been speaking of the bodily death of the martyrs. "Ah, but," says the message, "there is a far more solemn death than that obvious one. If physical death is the separation of the soul from the body, remember that there is also a spiritual death which means the separation of the soul from God." Death does not mean cessation of being. Its primary thought is separation. "What touches the surface of mere bodily life is but a faint shadow and parable; and the second death is like a second tier of mountains behind and above it, sterner and darker than the lower hills of the foreground. What desolation, what unrest, what blank misgivings, what peeling of capacities, faculties, opportunities, delights, may be involved in that solemn conception we never can tell here. God grant that we may never know."¹

Then there is the positive side of the promise. The faithful shall obtain the crown of life. One of the great words in the Bible is "faithful." It is full of encouragement. You may not be gifted or great, educated or eloquent, successful or known to fame: but you can be found in

¹ McLaren, "The Victor's Crowns," p. 12.

your place ; you can do your part ; you can carry your share of the burden ; you can be faithful. “ Well done, good and faithful servant.” Faithfulness is the fitness that prepares the head to wear the crown.

When the fires were being kindled around Polycarp, one who stood by heard these words of prayer upon his lips : “ O Father of Thy well beloved Son, Jesus Christ, I bless Thee that Thou hast counted me worthy of this day and this hour. I thank Thee that I am permitted to put my lips to the cup of Christ. And I thank Thee for the sure hope of the resurrection, and for the incorruptible life of heaven. I praise Thee for all Thy soul-saving benefits. And I glorify Thee through our Eternal High Priest, Jesus Christ, through whom, and in the Holy Ghost, be glory to Thee, both now and ever. Amen.” Assuredly he was faithful unto death.

Paul writes of his converts as being his crown of rejoicing.¹ He speaks of the crown of righteousness that awaited himself when he should meet the King.² Peter tells of the crown of glory that we shall receive when the chief Shepherd

¹ 1 Thess. 2. 19.

² 2 Tim. 4. 8.

shall appear; and the Apostle James¹ and this letter to Smyrna each speak of "the crown of life." The crown spoken of here is not the royal diadem worn by kings. It is the victor's garland won in the contest. Paul tells of the discipline and self-control with which the ancient contestants prepared themselves for the games. All this they did for a fading garland of leaves, that began to decay the moment it touched the victor's brow. They did it for a corruptible crown. How intense should be our struggle to win, not that which perishes and dies, but a crown of life that fadeth not away. It is only for him who overcomes. "No cross, no crown; no pain, no palm; no grief, no gladness; no thorns, no throne."²

And this is the key that unlocks the whole mystery. Out of the sorrows that filled them with weeping will yet come the coronation that will crown them with rejoicing. Out of the poverty that covered them with rags will come the righteousness that will clothe them in the garments of spotless purity. Out of the scorn that filled them with shame will come the "well-done" and welcome that shall fill the

¹ Jas. 1. 12.

² W. Penn.

skies with singing. Out of the prison that made them captive will come the emancipation that shall set them free. Patience, suffering soul ! “ Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.”¹ Now the gloom of the dark valley ; but “ there will be no dark valley when Jesus comes.” “ Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life.”

¹ Psalm 30. 5.

Christ's Letter to the Church at
Pergamum

The Letter of the Lord Jesus,
Our Risen, Ascended and Glorified
Prophet, Priest and King.

Sent by His servant John.

“And to the Angel of the
CHURCH IN PERGAMUM

Write : —

These things saith he who hath the sharp two-edged sword. I know where thou dwellest, *even* where Satan's throne is : and thou holdest fast my name, and didst not deny my faith, even in the days of Antipas, my martyr my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwelleth. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, namely, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication. So thou hast also some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans in like manner. Repent, therefore ; or else I am coming to thee quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of my mouth. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To him that overcometh, to him will I give of the hidden manna, and I will give to him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written, which none knoweth but he who receiveth it.”

Rev. 2. 12-17.

The Isle called Patmos.

CHAPTER III

Pergamum

MORE than fifty miles in a direct line¹ to the north of Smyrna, there is a broad and beautiful valley through which the river Caicus flows. Out of this wide plain rises a remarkable hill; massive, conical, isolated. On the summit of this hill was built the city of Pergamum which Pliny declared was "by far the most illustrious city of Asia." It was a place of commanding strength and beauty, a city set on a hill. Looking southward from this eminence, the view extends to the mountains beyond Smyrna, and westward there spreads out the waters of the Aegean Sea, some fifteen miles away.

Professor W. M. Ramsay having visited this site, writes of it: "No city of the whole of Asia Minor, so far as I have seen—and there

¹ Ninety miles by rail and carriage.

are few of any importance that I have not seen—possesses the same imposing and dominating aspect. It is the one city of the land which forced from me the exclamation, ‘A royal city!’ There is something unique and overpowering in its effect, planted as it is on its magnificent hill, standing out boldly in the level plain, and dominating the valley and the mountains on the south.”¹

Ephesus and Smyrna were extensive commercial centres. Pergamum stood somewhat apart from the great routes of traffic, and its pre-eminence was political. It rose into prominence in the early part of the third century before Christ, and was the capital of a distinguished line of kings. In 133 B.C. it became a possession of Rome; and when John was in Patmos, the Roman Proconsul for the Province had his official residence there. It was also a great literary centre. At one time it had a library of two hundred thousand volumes. Ptolemy, the king of Egypt, prohibited the export of papyrus, lest this library should exceed the famous one in Alexandria. Not to be thwarted, Eumenes, its sovereign, perfected

¹ Ramsay's "Letters to Seven Churches," p. 295.

the use of skins for writing purposes ; and hence it is that our word parchment comes from the name Pergamum. Galen, the celebrated physician, was a native of this city. The present town built on the plain below has a population of about fourteen thousand inhabitants. Let us now notice :—

I. The *Character* in which our Lord introduces Himself. He is the One having the sharp two-edged sword ; and in verse 16 we have the further expression, “ the sword of My mouth.” Like the introduction to each of the other letters, this description is taken from the great vision in the first chapter. Its appropriateness here is most striking. The sword is the symbol of the military power, the emblem of the kingly ; the Roman envoy in Pergamum wore a sword as the insignia of office. O Pergamum, and all that thou dost represent ! there is another King greater than the Caesars ; another sovereignty that dominates the empires of earth ; One who “ doth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth : and none can stay His hand or say unto Him, What dost Thou ? ” One who goes forth

conquering and to conquer, and who shall reign when all the nations of this world shall have crumbled into dust ! The sword of Pergamum is confronted by the sword of God.

But consider how remarkable this figure is. At first thought, the representation may seem incongruous. We must bear in mind, however, that the imagery of Scripture was not intended for representation on canvas or stone. The interdiction was even put into the Decalogue, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image ; or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth." ¹ Pictorial representation would have led them into idolatry. The Jews, under Divine tutelage, subordinated form to truth ; while the Greeks, on the other hand, subordinated truth to form. Nothing can approach the vigour of the Hebrew literature, and in it truth is always made supreme. Hence the virility and power of the Word of God. "Thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece." ² But when we reflect a moment, the instructiveness of this strange symbolism comes to us with wondrous power.

¹ Exod. 20. 4.

² Zech. 9. 13.

There are two things suggested in this condensed figure :—

1. That which comes forth from the lips is speech ; and here the speech is the Word of God. The Word of God is here compared with the large two-edged, sharp-pointed Thracian sword. It penetrates, it divides, it separates, it searches out, it lays bare, it commands, it conquers. In Isaiah we have the same figure. “ And he made my mouth like a sharp sword.”¹ In Ephesians 6. 17 we learn that the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. Hebrews 4. 12 explains all : “ For the Word of the Lord is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword ; and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

The church in Pergamum is to be tested by the Word of God ; and error will be separated from the truth. So God’s Word is to judge us here, as it will at the last day divide the righteous from the wicked. It will sweep away the vail from every secret sin, and explore every part of our being. This was the sword

¹ Isa. 49. 2.

that with two flaming edges guarded the entrance into Eden ; the sword with which Israel conquered her foes ; the sword with which the Christ repelled the tempter ; the sword whereby Paul won his victories all over the Roman Empire ; the sword before which the idols of heathenism are to-day falling ; the sword that is destined to vanquish all the powers of darkness and conquer the world for Christ. "The Word of the Lord endureth for ever." We must take with us into every battle the sword of the Spirit, if we would come off triumphant.

II. *Commendation.*

There are some blessed things said of this church. "Thou holdest fast My name." This is positive. "And thou hast not denied My faith." This is put negatively—which is often the strongest way of putting a thing. By name is meant personality, selfhood. The name of Christ would include all that He is as the God-man, all that He came to accomplish by His life and atoning sacrifice, and all that He is now working out as our exalted High-priest and King—all His attributes, all His offices. "Thou holdest fast," is a strong expression. Once lower this true conception

of the Person and work of Christ, and the church has capitulated and her power is gone. Then, too, these Christians at Pergamum had been loyal to the inexpressibly precious body of beliefs that are the heritage of the people of God. They had not denied the faith. A man without a creed is a man without a conviction. Indeed the very word “creed” signifies belief.

Yet more, they did all this in the face of bitter persecution. It is pathetic to remember that we know nothing of any value beyond what is here recorded regarding Antipas; and yet it is enough, and it is glorious. Perhaps he was the first in the noble succession of martyrs of that city. What matters it that nothing definite concerning him is to be learnt from the early church historians; his name is written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. Ancient Pergamum is to-day a mass of ruins; but after eighteen hundred years there still hovers over that hill, like a star, the ever-blessed name of Antipas. Wheresoever in the whole world this Gospel shall be preached, his name will be mentioned. All earthly monuments will yet perish in the dust, but this one shall endure

till the heavens and the earth are no more. What an epitaph—in which every word is true, being inscribed by Christ Himself: “Antipas, my martyr, my faithful one”!

Moreover, an important sidelight is thrown on the perilous position of this church by certain startling expressions that we find in this letter. “I know”—not “thy works,” but—“I know where thou dwellest.” It is where Satan dwelleth. Yea, even where Satan has his throne. The vice-regal throne was in Pergamum; and so also we meet the word “throne” there in connexion with Satan. It was the citadel of his kingdom. Now we can only conjecture what is meant by these terrible words. But there are certain suggestive facts that may help us.

1. Being the political centre of the Province, it would be the place to which the saints were sent from all over the land for trial and death.

2. It was at Pergamum that the worship of the Emperor as a god was first set up in Asia. This made the position of the Christians peculiarly trying. If they did not burn incense and worship before the image of Caesar, they

were accused of disloyalty and treason, and summarily put to death.

3. Being the political centre, it was also the headquarters of pagan worship. The city was crowded with heathen temples. Jupiter, Juno, Venus, Bacchus, Aesculapius—all had their great temples clustered there. The last was specially prominent, and was worshipped under the symbol of a great living serpent tended by priests—loathsome symbol of Satan. Some of the finest pagan temples that the world has ever beheld stood in this city. There can yet be seen there, for example, the ruins of an altar to Zeus, 123 feet long, 113 feet wide, and 40 feet high, covered with elaborate carving. Rites so unspeakably vile were taking place in this city that they were alluded to rather than described even by heathen pens.

Now combine these three thoughts, and we have in Pergamum (1) a cathedral city of paganism; (2) a pagan university town; and (3) the residence of a pagan viceroy to enforce all these evils. Nothing more is necessary to enable us to understand how it came to pass that Satan's throne is described as located there. Yet this noble church did not flinch.

It stood forth grandly for the faith once for all delivered unto the saints. It showed to the world that it was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.

III. *Condemnation.*

This falls into two sections. It relates to the teaching of the Balaamites and the teaching of the Nicolaitans—two streams that united into one dark river. The history of Balaam is given in the book of Numbers, and there are references to him in other portions of the Bible. Briefly stated the story is this: Balak, King of Moab, sent for him to come and curse Israel: and he came to do this for “hire,”¹ “the rewards of divination,”² “the wages of unrighteousness”;³ but when he beheld from the mountains the camps of Israel spread out in the valley below, his curses were changed into blessings. He exclaimed, “How can I curse whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy whom the Lord hath not defied?”⁴ Thus far his visit was a complete failure. Israel could not be hurt from without. But now he took another course. He

¹ Neh. 13. 2.

² Num. 22. 7.

³ 2 Peter 2. 15.

⁴ Num. 23. 8.

and the King of Moab had an interview,¹ in which he instructed the disappointed king that the only way by which he could destroy Israel would be from within, by corrupting the people, and leading them into sin. Then comes the deplorable incident in Numbers 25., where Israel was lured into the idolatry of Moab, and into its gross immorality, until the plague of God broke forth upon them, and 24,000 of the people were slain before this iniquity was put away. Observe carefully that this incident of Baal-Peor was instigated by Balaam. Numbers 31. 16 makes this clear: "Behold these caused the children of Israel, *through the counsel of Balaam*, to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor." Lead them into idolatry and into gross sin: that is the only way to cause Israel to perish—such was the counsel of Balaam.

Now, turning to this letter, let us read again Revelation 2. 14: "But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there some that hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught

¹ Num. 24. 25.

Balak to cast a stumblingblock ¹ before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.” These gross and revolting teachings of Balaam in Numbers found a place in Pergamum among those who are here designated as walking in Balaam’s footsteps. The teaching of the Nicolaitans led to the same result, but from a different standpoint. They appear to have believed that if a man was saved he was free to do as he pleased; and therefore they plunged into all sorts of excesses. It was a form of Antinomianism that led in practice to the same vile results as the teaching of Balaam.

Remember also that it is “the teaching” in both cases that is mentioned—*the teaching* of the Balaamites, and *the teaching* of the Nicolaitans. Creed and conduct are welded together in the indissoluble relation of cause and effect. It may take a long time to show itself. Some of the early Jesuits were men remarkable for their zeal and fervour; but ere long their teaching bore its blighting results. False doctrine will lead to false conduct, just

¹ σκάνδαλον.

as surely as an evil tree will bear evil fruit. "For as a man thinketh within himself so is he."¹ Some of both these classes existed in the church at Pergamum, and were tolerated there. Laxity of church discipline was their special sin. A state of things existed among them suggestive of that which we find in the Old Testament, when idols were set up in the temple of Jehovah, and the worship of Molech and Ashtoreth was condoned and found a place conjointly with the worship of the Lord God of Israel. "What fellowship have righteousness and iniquity? Or what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial?" (2 Cor. 6. 14, 15). The Jewish law did not permit a clean and an unclean animal to be harnessed to the same work. "Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together" (Deuteronomy 22. 10). Unworthy and sinful conduct allowed to grow up in the church and remain uncondemned will soon make its home there; other and further compromises will be constantly suggested; the standards of Christian life will sink to low and yet lower levels; and

¹ Prov. 23. 7.

the witness of the church against the sins of the world will be silenced and destroyed.

Moreover, no greater wrong can be done to a person who is unworthy than to retain him in the church. Such an one is thereby led to believe that he is safe; and he is in danger of slumbering on until the thunders of the eternal world will awake him too late from his false security. By such retention we also greatly wrong the church. Christianity is inevitably measured by the conduct of its professed followers. In any army each soldier is taught to act as if the fate of the whole army depended on him; and occasions may arise when it does. Neglect of this duty on the part of the church is made a matter of the most serious indictment. There are four admonitions:—

1. “Thou hast there some that hold the teaching of Balaam.” “So hast thou some that hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans in like manner.”

2. But since for reasons of policy or indifference, or other causes, these teachings were tolerated without protest, the sin ceased to be simply the sin of these offending members, and became the sin of the whole church. “I

have a few things against thee”—that is, against the body of believers in Pergamum as represented by their pastor.

3. The Lord commands the church to repent of its neglect of duty. “Repent, therefore.”

4. Then comes a solemn warning. “Or else I am coming to thee quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.” Unless this duty were promptly attended to, heavy judgments would speedily come upon them. When the church is pure, she is invincible. There must be no alloy in the seven lampstands. They were to be all of solid gold. Alas that it should ever be otherwise! In writing to the Philippians, Paul says, “For many walk, of whom I told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ.”¹ Judgment must begin at the house of God. The record of the church must be cleansed from all contamination. “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; and I will receive you and will be to you a Father, and ye shall be to Me sons and daughters,

¹ Phil. 3. 18.

saith the Lord Almighty.”¹ Did Pergamum obey the message of her risen Lord? A traveller² who visited Pergamum records finding hardly a trace of Christianity there; save for the deserted ruins of several broken down churches, and a few wretched people who claimed to be Christians, but who were utterly unworthy of the name. God had removed the lampstand. “He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”

IV. The *Counsel* and the *Promise*.

It will be observed that the rewards increase in importance according to the difficulties that are to be overcome. In Ephesus it was simply life that was promised. “He shall eat of the tree of life.” In Smyrna it is life unending. “He shall not be hurt of the second death.” With Pergamum it is the nourishment of this eternal life—“the hidden manna.” Two promises are made to “him that overcometh” in Pergamum:

1. The New Name and the White Stone. Thou didst hold fast My “name,” now I will give thee “a new name.” A new name may

¹ 2 Cor. 6. 17, 18.

² Rev. Josiah Brewster.

signify higher rank and added honours. A man joins the army. He has the name of soldier. But one day he receives a new name. He is advanced until he becomes colonel, and is at the head of the regiment. Moreover, we find in numerous instances in Scripture that when a man is himself changed, and becomes, as it were, a new self, he receives a new name: Saul becomes Paul. In like manner, when God is revealed in a new relationship He is introduced by a new name.

What then is meant by this white stone bearing a new name, which no man knoweth but the one that receiveth it? The reference is uncertain, and there is much diversity of interpretation. We are reminded that white pebbles were dropped into the urn by the Greek judges for acquittal, and black ones for guilt; that a stone was bestowed on the victor in the games which conferred certain privileges; that a stone was given to guests as a passport to idol-banquets; that a white stone broken in two and each taking a part, was a token of friendship, etc. None of these explanations is satisfactory. The white pebbles were not given to the prisoner, but they were cast into the urn;

and the name of the man on trial was not written upon them. All this imagery is drawn from heathen sources, while the significant symbolism of the Revelation is derived from the Old Testament. Think of the manna, then recall the wilderness; then remember that Jewish writers tell us, that in the folds of the Urim and Thummim there was a precious stone, perhaps a diamond of the purest white, shining (as the diamond is reserved from among the precious stones on the breastplate), and that on this stone there was written the new ineffable name of Jehovah. That hidden stone—the manna was also hidden—with the new name of God written upon it, “I will give to him that overcometh.” Now, as name stands for personality, the interpretation would be this: “The new name” of God stands for a new revelation of God. Overcome, and we shall have such fresh revelations of God’s presence and nearness and riches and love, that He will have for us a new diviner name. None can receive it but those who have had those disclosures within their own experience.

The love of Jesus, what it is
None but His loved ones know.

“The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him.”¹ The new name would thus represent a new blessedness coming from a fresh vision of God; and by this new vision the soul will become transformed into the same image, so that the child of God also will have this new name. This view, at least in part, is advocated by Archbishop Trench, and is followed by many others. By adopting it, we see that these promises are united in time and place, and that they both relate to the wilderness history of God’s people.

2. Equally wonderful is the other promise to him that overcomes. If the first allusion is obscure, this one is manifest to everybody. The manna fell day by day; and if not used, it perished. A pot of manna was put into the Ark of the Covenant in the most holy place, and that manna never decayed. It became incorruptible. In John 6 Jesus tells us that in this wilderness world He is the true Manna that came down from heaven. Ever since His ascension He has been hidden from physical sight behind the vail in the Most Holy Place, and in His glorified humanity He dieth no more; death hath

¹ Psalm 25. 14.

no more dominion over Him. He is, therefore, to-day the "Hidden Manna." To him that overcometh is given to feed on the unseen but ever-present Christ. "Whom having not seen, we love." The analogy is exceedingly beautiful.

The application, then, is this: These false teachers would have you believe that all pleasure is in the world, that it is sensuous, and is to be found in sin. But their feasts are foul and tainted and death-dealing. They spend their money on that which is not bread, and their labour for that which cannot satisfy. Cast all this away from you! "I am the Hidden Manna," Jesus says in effect. "Eat, and your soul shall live. In Me alone can all the hunger of the soul be satisfied. Desire Me, and you shall possess Me. He that eateth this bread shall never hunger." "In Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand are pleasures for evermore."¹

¹ Psalm 16. 11.

Christ's Letter to the Church at Thyatira

The Letter of the Lord Jesus,
Our Risen, Ascended and Glorified
Prophet, Priest and King.

Sent by His servant John.

"And to the angel of the
CHURCH IN THYATIRA

Write : —

These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes as a flame of fire, and his feet like burnished brass. I know thy works and love and faith and ministry and thy steadfastness and that thy last works are more than the first. But I have against thee *this*, that thou sufferest the woman Jezebel, who calleth herself a prophetess, and she teacheth and seduceth my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time that she might repent, and she is not willing to repent of her fornication. Behold, I cast her into a bed, and those who commit adultery with her into great affliction, if they repent not of her works. And her children will I kill with death ; and all the churches shall know that I am he who searcheth reins and hearts and I will give to each one of you according to your works. But to you I say, to the rest who are in Thyatira, as many as have not this teaching, who knew not the deep things of Satan, as they say : I cast on you no other burden. Howbeit, that which ye have, cling to until I come. And he that overcometh, and he that keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give authority over the nations ; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are they broken to shivers ; as I also have received of my Father. And I will give to him the morning star. He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches."

Rev. 2. 18-29.

The Isle called Patmos.



Thyatira

Thyatira

General view of the modern town. There are no extensive ruins above ground.

Thyatira.

General view of modern town. There are no extensive ruins above ground.

The town is described as being walled by a city of stone.

The town is described as being walled by a city of stone.

The town is described as being walled by a city of stone.

The town is described as being walled by a city of stone.

The town is described as being walled by a city of stone.

The town is described as being walled by a city of stone.

The town is described as being walled by a city of stone.

The town is described as being walled by a city of stone.

The town is described as being walled by a city of stone.

The town is described as being walled by a city of stone.

The town is described as being walled by a city of stone.

The town is described as being walled by a city of stone.

The town is described as being walled by a city of stone.

The town is described as being walled by a city of stone.

The town is described as being walled by a city of stone.

The town is described as being walled by a city of stone.

The town is described as being walled by a city of stone.

The town is described as being walled by a city of stone.

The town is described as being walled by a city of stone.

The town is described as being walled by a city of stone.

The town is described as being walled by a city of stone.

The town is described as being walled by a city of stone.

The town is described as being walled by a city of stone.

The town is described as being walled by a city of stone.

CHAPTER IV

Thyatira

THE city of Pergamum was built on a high hill; Thyatira was situated on a level plain. It lay forty miles ¹ south-east of the former city, where a long valley that extends north and south joins the valley of the Hermus which runs east and west. The location is described as an "open, smiling vale, bordered by gently sloping hills of moderate elevation, but sufficient to overshadow the vale." ²

Probably an ancient Lydian city had existed there; but Thyatira first rose into prominence about the beginning of the third century before Christ, when it was settled by Seleucus I., one of Alexander's generals, with a colony of Greeks from Macedonia. Invading armies coming from the east or south toward Pergamum would first have to pass Thyatira. It was, therefore, a military outpost planted to check the advance

¹ Fifty miles by rail and carriage. ² Ramsay, p. 318.

of an approaching foe. Being destitute of natural defences, fortifications had to be built, and a strong garrison was maintained. Liable to constant attack, it was the imperilled city of the plain. It became a Roman possession in the year 190 B.C.; and under the security of that strong government, its perils from invasion were greatly diminished. Thus it became less military in its character, and proportionately greater commercially. Trade guilds sprang up in every direction, and it is known that among these there was a craft of bronze workers, whose industry was carried on extensively in Thyatira. Is there any suggestion here as to the feet of burnished brass mentioned in this letter? At any rate, the appropriateness of the figure to the early military life of the city, the tread of might and power, like that of an army, will at once be recognized.

The industrial character of the city is also reflected by those guilds that dealt in garments and dyes. What was then called "purple" was a colour obtained from a certain root which was abundant in that region. The present population of Thyatira is about ten thousand; and the art of dyeing, for which

it was once so famous, renders it so still. "Large quantities of scarlet cloth are sent to Smyrna, whence it is exported and widely distributed." ¹

We remarked that Thyatira was founded by a colony from Macedonia. It was probably in the spring of A.D. 50, forty-five years prior to the writing of the book of Revelation, that Paul was in Troas, and had his vision of the man from Macedonia, saying, "Come over and help us." It was in Philippi, the chief city of that section of Macedonia, that Paul first preached the gospel in Europe. His first convert there was Lydia, a dealer in purple, of the city of Thyatira, whose heart the Lord opened, so that she gave heed to the things that were spoken by Paul.² This coincidence assists to elevate Thyatira into a yet more interesting position in the religious world. Although in Philippi, Lydia was still "of" (not from) Thyatira—that is to say, she was only temporarily sojourning in Philippi; while her home was still in her native city some three hundred miles away. This may be the reason why her name does not appear in the subsequently written Epistle to the Philippians.

¹ McIlvaine, p. 72.

² Acts 16. 14.

May it not have been the case that Paul's first convert in Macedonia at once hastened away to the East, and carried the Gospel to her own Macedonian city of the Province of Asia ? There was ample time for her return to set Thyatira ablaze with the story of the cross, and become the instrument of founding this great church. On that first Sabbath in Philippi, Paul went out to meet with a small company of devout women who were holding a prayer meeting by the river side. How little we know the far-reaching results of any service, or can foresee who shall wear the crown when we gather yonder ! In this instance it may be that this Jewess, or at least this proselyte to the Jewish faith, who came to trade and make wealth in the West, found there a wealth that she never dreamed of—the pearl of great price. We have thus spoken of one woman whose name was associated with Thyatira, and in her we find woman at her best. Presently we shall have to mention the fearful name of another woman associated with the same city—representing woman at her worst.

This middle Epistle is the longest of the seven. There is also a change in the form. In the first three letters the Call is placed before

the promise. Beginning with Thyatira, this order is changed, and the Call is placed last; as if to add further emphasis to the blessing pronounced upon the overcoming one—the last four letters ending with the solemn words, “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.” Here we observe:—

I. The *Character* in which our Lord addresses this church. Three things are affirmed of Him: (1) He is Omniscient. His eyes are like a flame of fire, penetrating into the remotest recesses down to the very depths of Satan, so that nothing can escape His gaze. We therefore read in the twenty-third verse, “I am He that searcheth reins and hearts; and I will give unto each one of you according to your works.” All sham and pretence are acts of supremest folly, for we are standing every moment in the searchlight of eternal worlds. That which is done in secret shall yet be published on the house-tops, and every soul will have assigned to it its true place and position. He will “bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart.”

(2) He is Omnipotent. As in Pergamum we have the sword, so here also the feet of burnished

brass are similarly a figure of the kingly, whereby with the mien of a conqueror He will trample down the forces of evil. He is resistless. "He can create and He destroy." Both these descriptions are taken directly from the opening vision in the first chapter.

(3) A third characteristic is also implied. It is the summing up of the whole impression. This is the only instance in the whole book of Revelation in which Jesus is directly called "The Son of God." All language is poor when we come to speak of the peerless pre-eminence of Christ. He is "Son," not in the sense of succession in time, for God is of eternity and that is timeless; but Son in the sense of nature and co-equal rank.

This is made absolutely clear and unequivocal in the Scriptures. "All men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father."¹ The Father addressing the Son said: "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever."² Jesus spoke of God as His Father, thus making Himself the Son of God. The Jews took up stones to stone Him. "Many good works have I showed you from the Father," said Jesus; "for which of those works do ye stone Me?" The Jews answered, "For

¹ John 5. 23.

² Heb. 1. 8.

a good work we stone Thee not, but for blasphemy, because that Thou, being a man, makest Thyself God." They charged Him with blasphemy because He said, "I am the Son of God"; well knowing that this expression meant on His lips perfect unity in the Godhead: "that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father."¹ At the trial before the Sanhedrin, the High Priest stood up, and in the most solemn manner administered to Jesus the form of Jewish oath: "I adjure Thee by the living God, that Thou tell us whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of God?" Yet He calmly asserted this claim. Enraged, the High Priest rent his garments and shouted, "He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard His blasphemy. What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death."²

How wonderfully the twofold nature of Christ is everywhere brought out in the Scriptures. Born of Mary, we have His humanity. "But," said the angel, "He shall be called the Son of God."³ "Of the seed of David according to the flesh," said Paul, but also "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the

¹ John 10. 32-38, R.V. ² Matt. 26. 63-66. ³ Luke 1. 35.

Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”¹ So here also on the Isle of Patmos Jesus appeared to John at first as “a Son of man”; but before we advance far the apostle is prostrate at His feet worshipping Him as the Son of God. No book in all the Bible more honours and enthrones and glorifies Jesus than does the book of Revelation. He is at once a Son of man and also the Son of God. He is “over all, God blessed for ever.”² After this impressive introduction we come to the

II. *Commendation.*

The similarity of this Commendation to that of Ephesus will strike one at once; but there is a difference. There is first the general statement, “I know thy works”; and then the Commendation falls into three pairs: (1) thy love and faith; (2) thy ministry and steadfastness; and (3) thy last works and thy first. It will be seen that “works” introduce and close the list; as if they rimmed round the other inward graces, and became, as indeed they are, the outward expression of them. Just as fruit is the manifestation of the life of a tree, so works are the manifestation of the life of the soul. “By their fruits ye shall

¹ Rom. 1. 3, 4.

² Rom. 9. 5.

know them.” Love is the foundation grace. If that is wanting, then everything is wanting. Speak, if you will, with the tongues of men and of angels; but if love is absent, you are but a sounding brass and a clanging cymbal. “He’s an heir of Heaven who finds his bosom glow with love.”

Hand in hand with love goes her sister faith. They lead the procession. Faith is the connecting link that binds us to the very throne of God. All spiritual blessings come to us and are enjoyed by us through faith. “Without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto Him.”¹ “According to your faith, be it unto you.”² “Lord, increase our faith.”³ Following upon love and faith come their manifestations. Ministry, or service, is paired with patience, or steadfastness. Ministry follows love as effect follows cause; as the second table of the moral law follows the first. Love, and you will serve. Indeed, all true service is love in action. The same is true of faith and steadfastness. In storm and stress, in persecution and temptation, faith towards God will keep us steadfast and true. The soul that puts its trust in God shall

¹ Heb. 11. 6, R.V. ² Matt. 9. 29. ³ Luke 17. 5.

not make haste. Then we have the last pair of spiritual graces and manifestations, and this reverses that of Ephesus. The latter had left her first love; but Thyatira was growing in spiritual power. The flame on the lampstand was waxing steadily brighter. We are rejoiced to find one of these seven churches whose last works exceeded the first. This beautiful tribute is reminiscent of several passages written by Paul to the beloved church at Philippi.

How quickly the Master recognized all that was good and noble in this church!—and how inspiring to reflect that He is “the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.” As you think of Thyatira, you are ready to exclaim, What an ideal body of Christians! “Happy is that people whose God is the Lord.”¹ You are amazed that so remarkable an encomium could be bestowed upon a church concerning which such terrible things are about to be said. But the explanation soon appears. These blessed pronouncements were only true of a section of the church. This is made clear in verse 24: “But to you I say, to the rest who are in Thyatira, as many as have not this teaching, who knew not the deep things of Satan, as they say, I cast on you no other burden.”

¹ Psalm 144. 15.

This remnant had not compromised themselves. They are therefore not asked to repent, as was the church at Pergamum. They are simply exhorted to faithfulness and perseverance. “Howbeit that which ye have, cling to until I come” (verse 25).

III. *Condemnation.*

And now, with bated breath and a thrill of solemn awe, let us approach this aspect of the subject. Jezebel, the daughter of the Zidonian king, the wife of Ahab, the murderess of the prophets, the introducer of the vile worship of Baal into Israel, the leader of the people into heathen immoralities, has her antitype and namesake in Thyatira. Who she was who is so designated, we do not know. Some uncertainty exists in the text in the original. As will be seen in the margin of the R.V., some authorities read, “thy wife Jezebel”; as if she were the wife of the angel, or pastor of the church, instead of “the woman” Jezebel. The bare suggestion appals one; despite that it is one that is, generally speaking, rejected. We adhere to the usually accepted text and interpretation. She called herself a prophetess, and the depths of Satan were in her teaching.

If Pergamum had its Balaam, Thyatira had its Jezebel; and the practical results of the

teaching of both were the same. So that whereas the commendation of the church in Thyatira resembles that of Ephesus, the condemnation is like that of Pergamum. It would seem to have been an evil that had existed for some time. Opportunity was given her to repent, but she would not. How terribly sin hardens and withers and destroys! But dire judgments are about to break upon her; and the awful thunderbolts of God's displeasure will consume her, and those associated with her. Transgressions and punishment are linked together; and so manifest shall this coming destruction be, that the awed churches will ponder these things, and recognize that God will not be mocked. Thyatira should have severed herself from this evil, and caused her voice to be heard unequivocally for truth and righteousness. There must be no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.

Jezebel is the opposite of what woman should be. Nothing equals true womanhood in heroism of devotion, or in the sacrifices and services that she has made and is making for the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. "Last at His cross, she is earliest at His grave." But

when she strays from the mark of the high calling, how unspeakable the ruin! It is startling to recall that the three great religious apostasies¹ of the last half of the nineteenth century were originated by women. The first of these is what is called modern Spiritualism, which began in the city of Rochester, N.Y., about the middle of the past century, with the Fox sisters. It was introduced into Europe from Boston in 1852 by a Mrs. Hayden, a professional medium; and the movement spread like wild-fire through the world. In 1869 a Spiritualistic Journal claimed 3,000,000 converts in the United States alone; other journals claimed many more.² It was confidently predicted that Spiritualism was going to sweep everything before it. But it soon lost its power and influence, and is now believed to be waning everywhere. The exposure of frauds has been universal; the trivialities attributed to spirits as Divine revelation has exposed its advocates to ridicule; their denial of the deity of our Lord, and their loose views have become a world-wide scandal. If there is any fragment of truth left after this mass

¹ See "Lights and Shadows of American Life," by A. C. Dixon, D.D., page 150, etc.

² See "Encyclopædia Britannica," art. "Spiritualism."

of dishonest rubbish is swept aside, it is Satanic, and will only deceive, blight and destroy those who follow it. Let us not touch it. It is the enemy of the soul.

The second apostasy is Theosophy, which in its modern concrete form originated with Madam Blavatsky. A Theosophical Society was started in New York in 1875, and it also spread rapidly. Mahatmas from the Himalaya Mountains near Tibet were said to come through the air to instruct us; and its followers profess to believe the most silly and childish pretensions. Actually it is the revival of an effete paganism, which has been dead and buried in its native land for hundreds of years. It can exert an influence only over those who are so far outside of the pale of Christian influences as to be themselves practically pagan.

The third departure is now in the heyday of its glory. Christian Science is associated with the name of Mrs. Eddy. While the spread of Spiritualism appears to have been even more rapid in its early growth, yet the growth of Christian Science has also been remarkable. It has laid hold of many wealthy people; and the "Mother" Church in Boston, with its magnificent building,

claims to have over 40,000 members, though that is disputed. It is no answer to assert that many Christian Scientists live proper external lives. So other errorists have done. This is the usual stock argument among new religious cults. Further, it is no answer to claim to have wrought many wonderful cures. The same guarantees may be read in regard to any patent medicine, and they may be as fully certified to in any popular list of domestic remedies. The system has not yet had time fully to develop its principles and show their practical results to the world. It is only some thirty years old. It is no unkindness to say that it is neither Christian nor scientific—it is “science falsely so called.”¹

Any teaching which denies the fact of human suffering, the reality of matter, the existence of any such thing as sin or evil, the need of the atonement, the miracles of the Bible, death and the coming judgment, not only contradicts Scripture and common sense, but has in it seeds of deadliest error, which in time will certainly bear their blighting and destructive harvests. It is living at present on the Christian

¹ 1 Tim. 6. 20.

principles of its followers who have forsaken the Christian fold, and have been misled into uniting with it. When these orthodox principles shall have had time to disappear, Christian Science will stand forth in its true colours before the world, and it will be found that it has in it the depths of Satan. Many believe that this delusion has already reached its height, and that the time of deterioration and decay is near at hand. Recent exposures have done it great damage. It must go the way of many an error which has preceded it.

These little systems have their day and cease to be ; but “ the Word of the Lord endureth for ever.” Let us cling to that truth which has been tested for thousands of years, and which, wherever it has gone, has uplifted and transformed the world ! Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid in the Gospel. This brings us to the

IV. *Counsel and Reward.*

“ And he that overcometh and he that keepeth My works unto the end, to him will I give authority over the nations ; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are they broken to shivers ; as I also

have received of My Father. And I will give to him the morning star."

There is something added here for the overcoming one. "It is he that overcometh and *he that keepeth My works unto the end.*" Note carefully the tremendous emphasis which is put here on endurance to the end. Herein seems to have lain the special peril among the faithful at Thyatira. No addition like this is made in any of the other letters. Not those who have simply started the race, or those who have run a little way and then fallen out, but these who continue to the very last and reach the goal—only these are they who win the prize. The promise is based chiefly upon the second Psalm, which points to the great reigns of David and Solomon, when the temporal kingdom of Israel reached the zenith of its glory—that period which was predictive of Christ's universal reign. We have described for us the occupations and interests of the new life. Three promises are made, namely, of dominion, victory, glory.

Let us refer again to the second Psalm, and we find that the nations are to be given to Christ as His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth are to become His possession. Then he that

overcometh and endureth is to have "authority over the nations." Christ and His saints are yet to rule the world. When the kingdoms of this world are His, they shall also belong to His people. Every victory achieved for Christ in Africa, in Japan, in China, in the islands of the sea, belongs to us all. He permits us to be associated with Him in His triumphal progress.

In the second Psalm we read, "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron ; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." And in this fourth letter the overcoming one is to rule the nations with a rod of iron and break them to pieces like the vessels of a potter. What means the whole history of human conflict—nation dashed to pieces against nation, kingdom hurled into fragments against opposing kingdom ? Alas, it is the sad record of human passion and ambition. And it is more than that. Out of all this dark turmoil God is surely working out His plan of the ages, and He is preparing the world for the coming of His Kingdom. Out of the eater, He is bringing forth meat ; and out of the strong, sweetness. He is causing the wrath of man to praise Him, and the remainder of wrath He will restrain. The iron sceptre of His Providence,

that is breaking in pieces the nations, is also preparing the way for the golden sceptre of His grace. In all this His people are kept in remembrance. “Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world?”¹ And this leads us to the last reward—“And I will give to him the morning star.” Milton sang :

Hesperus, that led the starry host, rode brightest.

In the Book of Job the morning stars are heard chanting together their hymns of praise over the creation of our world ; and in the close of Revelation we learn that Jesus Himself is “the Bright and Morning Star.” Ah, believing, persevering, winning saint of God, all these possessions will yet be yours. You will be sharer in His dominion, in His victories, in His glory. And greatest of all, He will give you also Himself. “How shall He not also with Him freely give us all things?”²

How beautiful are the words of Bishop Wordsworth on this last resplendent promise : “And I will give unto him the morning star, which puts to flight the night and ushers in the dawn ; an emblem of the victory of light over darkness ; and of the triumph of the children of light over the false

¹ 1 Cor. 6. 2.

² Rom. 8. 32.

teachers, who are like wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever :¹ and therefore a fit emblem of Him who is the Dayspring from on high,² and brings life and immortality to light ; and whose appearance at the last day will be like the morning star of eternity, ushering in that glorious day which has no evening,³ and who will grant to His faithful servants to shine like the stars for ever and ever.”

¹ Jude 13.

² Luke 1. 78.

³ Rev. 22. 16.

Christ's Letter to the Church at Sardis

The Letter of the Lord Jesus,
Our Risen, Ascended and Glorified
Prophet, Priest and King.

Sent by His servant John.

“And to the Angel of the
CHURCH IN SARDIS

Write :—

These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars. I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead. Become watchful and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die : for I have found no works of thine fulfilled before my God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and didst hear ; and keep and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come as a thief, and thou shalt in no wise know what hour I will come upon thee. But thou hast a few names in Sardis which did not defile their garments : and they shall walk with me in white ; for they are worthy. He that overcometh shall thus clothe himself in white garments ; and in no wise will I blot out his name out of the book of life : and I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”

Rev. 3. 1-6.

The Isle called Patmos.



Sardis.

Looking eastward. In the foreground are pillars of the Temple of Cybele. The citadel is seen on the crest of the hill opposite left pillar.

CHAPTER V

Sardis

SARDIS had been a famous city. It was located thirty-five miles in a direct line south-east from Thyatira.¹ The spacious valley of Hermus is bounded on the south by Mount Molus. Projecting from this range there is a narrow ridge of land running northward, and terminating in a lofty spur that dominates the plain below. On the plateau of that spur was built the splendid acropolis of Sardis. It was over 1,500 feet above the valley. The sides were practically perpendicular. The only mode of approach was from the south, along that neck or isthmus of land which connected it with the mountains that lay behind it. This approach was strongly fortified and jealously guarded. For the rest it would seem as if nature itself had made the place impregnable. "Toward the plain on the north,

¹ Seventy miles by rail and carriage.

toward the glens on the east and west, it presented the most imposing show—a city with walls and towers, temples, houses and palaces, filling the elevated plateau so completely that on all sides it looked as if one could drop a stone 1,500 feet straight into the plain from the outer buildings.”¹

To the west of the city and flowing northward from the mountains, so as to join the river Hermus, runs the Pactolus, whose stream was described by the Greeks as rolling over sands of gold. This Sardis was the ancient capital of the great Lydian Empire. Croesus, of proverbial wealth, was the last Lydian king. Herodotus tells us with much embellishment how Solon visited Croesus. Croesus showed him all his treasures and then confidently asked the Grecian sage, whom he regarded as the happiest of men? In Solon's reply two families were mentioned: one in humble circumstances when the husband fell in battle at the moment of victory; and the other when two sons, having won in the public games, and having drawn their mother in a carriage to a temple, died amid their honours. Croesus was crestfallen; but Solon

¹ Ramsay, p. 382.

warned him that the world is so full of vicissitudes, that no man should be counted happy until death put him beyond these. At the pyre where Cyrus, after conquest, condemned him to be burned, as the kindling fires began to gather around him, Croesus cried out, “ O Solon, Solon, Solon.” Cyrus asked what he meant; and being told the story, released Croesus, and made him his friend—so the legend runs.

But we are interested in knowing how Cyrus succeeded in capturing this lofty citadel. It resulted from over-confidence. The Lydians were certain that these perpendicular sides could never be scaled by the Persian hosts massed on the plain so far below. But one of Cyrus’ soldiers saw a Lydian coming down the cliff by a secret way on steps that were cut into the face of the precipice. Silently at night the Persian troops, one by one, ascended. There was no guard or sentinel at the top, as this was deemed unnecessary; and when Croesus awoke the next morning, the proud citadel was captured. They came, “ as a thief in the night.” This was in the year 549 B.C. But even this experience did not teach Sardis vigilance. In much the same way the city was captured again

in the year 218 B.C. Antiochus the Great laid siege to it for about twelve months, when a surefooted Cretan scaled the height and led the way. Once more the only place guarded was the gate to the south, and all the rest of the top was left unprotected, believing it to be absolutely inaccessible. Noiselessly the enemy climbed the height in the darkness, and stealthily obtained possession; and Sardis was again captured, and again the captor came "as a thief."

With what a thrill, then, must these solemn words of significant meaning have fallen upon the ears of the church, "I will come upon thee as a thief, and thou shalt in no wise know what hour I will come upon thee." Twice the city had fallen, and twice in this letter we have the stirring command, "Watch!" O Church of Sardis! repeat not thou the follies of this thy city. Be on thy guard, slumber not, be ever alert; thou hast to deal with deadlier and more insidious foes than Persian or Syrian invaders. "Strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die: for I have found no works of thine fulfilled before My God."

The remaining facts of interest in the history

of this city may be passed over rapidly. The lower town was burnt by certain Ionians in the year 501 B.C., and this led the incensed Persians to engage in their disastrous invasions of Greece under Darius and Xerxes. The city opened its gates and welcomed Alexander in 334, and it passed into the hands of the Romans in 190 B.C. After this the routes of trade changed, and at the time of our text the greatness of Sardis was on the wane. Like Smyrna, its chief worship was that of Cybele. Two columns of her great temple, sixty feet high and about six and a half feet in diameter, are yet standing on the plain below. Her worship was the foulest and the most debasing idolatry. All that is now left of this once proud capital is a little hamlet called Sart; while the supreme impression left on the visitor is one of indescribable solitude and desolation. Note:—

I. The *Character* in which our Lord introduces Himself.

“He that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars.” This description is taken from the first chapter, and the words “the seven stars” come directly from the great vision. These seven stars are mentioned also in the introduction

to the Ephesian letter, but for another purpose. The expression "the seven Spirits of God" is a remarkable and fruitful one. In the benediction with which this book is introduced, in chapter 1. 4, 5, are included "grace and peace"—first, "from Him who is and who was and who is coming," words applied in this case to the first person of the Trinity, the Eternal; and secondly, from "the seven Spirits that are before His throne," signifying the Divine Comforter; and then thirdly, "from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead"—Father, Spirit, Son—"God in three persons, blessed Trinity."

But why this word "seven"? It is a familiar enough expression in the Scriptures. Zechariah speaks of one stone having "seven eyes."¹ In Revelation 5. 6, the Lamb slain has "seven eyes," and "the seven Spirits of God" are sent forth into all the earth. The reason of its use is that "seven" is the symbol of completeness, of perfectness. We have here the one Holy Spirit of God in His complete and manifold operations. "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit."² Christ received the Spirit without measure.³ In Isaiah we have the vision of the

¹ Zech. 3. 9.² 1 Cor. 12. 4.³ John 3. 34.

Holy Spirit in His sevenfold blessing descending upon the Son of God. It means the plenitude and perfection of His work.

Thou the anointing Spirit art,
Who dost the sevenfold gift impart.

The appropriateness of this introduction is most suggestive. It sets forth the relation of the Holy Spirit (1) to a ministry of power. The seven stars are here, and side by side with these is the Spirit, sevenfold, to sanctify and bless that ministry. If the churches are to become what they should be, we must have pastors Spirit-filled and Spirit-fired. Culture we must have—trained men, able to cope with the problems that are pressing upon us for solution, strong men, leaders of men; but this equipment, without the Spirit of God to enlighten, would be like an elegant chandelier without light. We must have men who can speak out of the fulness of a deep personal experience, and who have a heart knowledge of God; men who testify that which they themselves have seen and heard. We need men who come to their pulpits from the secret place of power, their lips touched with heavenly fire, to preach the message that God bids them. Nothing is

more calamitous and lamentable than that the ministry should degenerate into a mere profession. Nothing will enervate and weaken, and become more pathetic and pitiable, than a ministry honeycombed with doubt. If at times the inferior students in our colleges are going into the ministry, there is somewhere a reason, and we should find it out. If worthy men are shunning a college training, fearing that their experience will be like that of a leading pastor in America, who said not long ago that it took him years to get rid of the unbelief which he was taught in his theological course, then would it not be well to pause and consider? Hearts enlightened by the Spirit of God will see things differently, whether in the pulpit, the classroom, or the professor's chair. If the lights are growing dim on the seven-branched lampstand, is it not, as suggested in Zechariah's vision, because the supply of oil from the two olive trees conveyed through the golden pipes is failing? Here in our text we discover the source of infinite supply. The Holy Spirit anoints, endues, qualifies, sends forth, blesses and makes abundantly fruitful. Never were the fields so ripe and so inviting; never

were the calls so numerous and so urgent ; never was the opportunity in the ministry so great as to-day.

Fields are white, and harvest waiting,
Who will bear the sheaves away ?

Next we have the Holy Spirit in His relation (2) to the church. If He is the source of light to the pulpit—the stars in Christ's right hand—He is also, no less, the source of life to the pew. The character of the introduction is just as forcible and applicable for the latter as it is for the former. "To this people sunken in spiritual deadness and torpor, the lamp of faith waning and almost extinguished in their hearts, the Lord presents Himself as having the fulness of all spiritual gifts ; able, therefore, to revive, able to recover, able to bring back from the very gates of spiritual death."¹ The only thing that could save this church was a fresh visitation from the Holy Spirit in mighty power.

Kindle a flame of sacred love
In these cold hearts of ours !

II. *Condemnation.*

For the first time in the course of these letters censure and warning are placed first, and the words of praise are withheld until later for the

¹ Trench, p. 206.

few who remained faithful. “ I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead.” Had we lived in the Province of Asia, near the close of the first century, and had we been asked which was the most important and prosperous of all the churches, it would be no wonder if we agreed that it was certainly Sardis. Why, it had “ *a name*,” that is to say, it was a famous church, known throughout all the country—a name *to live* : this, at any rate, was a church renowned everywhere for the activity of its service. There was nothing to show waning interest, as in the church of Ephesus ; no bitter persecutions, as at Smyrna ; no corrupt Balaamites or Nicolaitans, as at Pergamum ; no wicked Jezebel, as at Thyatira ; there was no appearance of deficient power, as at Philadelphia ; and there was none of the apathy and indifference that we shall find at Laodicea. This church at Sardis was a busy church. It had works. “ I know thy works.”

Modernizing the thought and applying it to ourselves, it has been written : “ There may be a popular ministry, a thronging congregation ; the house well built, well arranged, commodious ; the interior such as might gratify the

finest taste, and administer ease and comfort to the body ; the praises of God may appear to be sung by harmonious voices ; hosannas may dwell upon the tongues of the whole assembly ; reverence may mark the grave-toned utterances of prayer ; and the devotion of all, in appearance, be solemnly impressive—so much so that the spectator may feel and say, ‘ This is the house of God ’ ; an appropriate discourse may be delivered from some well chosen portion of the Word of God, and often here and there impassioned bursts of eloquence, as if proceeding from a soul catching the fire of heaven, and glowing in the majesty of that blissful region.”¹ And moreover, in addition to all this imposing worship, there may be active service. Large sums of money may be raised and contributed for philanthropic and benevolent work. Societies and organizations and committees may be in ceaseless operation. The whole place may become a hive of professed religious industry, so that the fame of the church is heralded far and wide, and her work held up as a model for the imitation of the earnest and the rebuke of the indifferent—all this,

¹ See “ The Seven Churches of Asia,” by Wills, p. 228.

excellent, valuable, commendable in itself, to be praised and to be admired—all this may exist as an external show without substance and without spiritual life behind it. Notwithstanding all, “Ichabod” may be written upon her walls, for her glory is departed. Nay, this activity may be but the galvanized mechanical movements of a religious corpse—“works,” “a name to live,” “dead”! There may be a great reputation before men, while the solemn fact behind it all is, “I have not found thy works fulfilled, filled full, when they were measured before God.” Prayers were abundant on earth, but none of them reached the throne of Heaven. Sweet music was sung in the sanctuary below, but not a note was heard in the holy of holies above. Beautiful acts of charity were performed, but received only the Pharisee’s reward. Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and present my body to feed the flames, if apostolic love be not the inspiring motive, it profiteth nothing.

A church is dead if it is composed of unregenerate members. That goes without saying. To be a Christian is to be raised from spiritual death into spiritual life. “And you did He make alive, when ye were dead through your

trespasses and sins.”¹ If we are strangers to the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, we are as dead branches mechanically attached to the living vine. Oh, how solemnly and searchingly should we ask ourselves the question in the presence of God, “Have I been born again?” But more, even real Christians may sometimes be spoken of as dead. Once active and devoted, they have lapsed into a condition of indifference and neglect, and there is a backsliding of heart before God. Wherever there is life you will find three faculties :

1. Growth. What more distressing sight is there in any family than a son whose growth has been arrested, and who has lived on ten, twenty, thirty years, weighing no more, requiring to be tended and watched and cared for, just as when he was only a few months old! A Christian who is not growing is a deformity.

2. Interest. If we are not possessed with a passion for saving the lost in our own city and country, and in every other land, wherever we can reach them directly or indirectly, then we are strangers to the mind of the Master, and we

¹ Eph. 2. 1.

are spiritually dead. At the well in Samaria Jesus said, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of. My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to accomplish His work."

3. Unity. Death means disintegration. Wherever there is division and discord and falling apart, we have death. The unity of the Spirit is to be kept in the bond of peace.

There were four steps by which this sad church now in the throes of dissolution could be saved.

1. Remember not *what* thou hast received, but *how* enthusiastically, with *how* great a welcome, with *how* much joy thou didst receive and didst hear; and as thou dost muse on the past, the fire revive and be renewed upon the altar.

2. Retain. Hold fast, or keep, that which thou hast. Guard well the smoking flax. Feed the feeble flame. Many of the greatest revivals begin in this humble way.

3. Repent. Regard this lapsing back into sin as a fearful thing to be avoided, and for which there is no palliation and no excuse; and let your sorrow be deep and sincere and abiding.

4. Be watchful. As we have seen, watchfulness is twice enjoined in this letter. This was the point of departure at which this church fell.

Declension of soul is like a chill in the atmosphere; it comes on gradually, imperceptibly. It is like a current in the waters of the sea, that we do not notice until we have drifted far out from the land. It is like the drowsiness that creeps over the traveller lost in Arctic snows, until he lies down to rise no more. Therefore watch against the first suggestion of a heart wandering away from thy God. Guard against the world without and the tempter within. Be vigilant against religious error. Nothing is so powerful as the truth. One single principle of the Bible long forgotten and at length brought to light again, namely, the doctrine of justification by faith, shook Europe like an earthquake, and ushered in the Reformation.

III. *Commendation.* Not for the church as a whole, for that is dead; but for the overcoming remnant who had retained their purity amid surrounding corruption, and whose garments were not defiled. The first promise is, "They shall walk with Me in white." In contrast with the many who had only a name, there were but a few names that "are worthy," and who possessed the reality. There are three great promises given to them: First, the gar-

ments of white. White is the livery of heaven. We have the head "white as snow," "the white stone," "the white garments," "the white robes," "the white cloud," "white horses," "white linen," "the white throne." On the Mount of Transfiguration our Lord's garments became "exceeding white, as no fuller on earth can whiten them."¹ How appropriate is all this imagery! The few faithful ones who walked with Christ in Sardis are by implication placed in contrast with the many who walked in sin in that city. And the white of their purity is put in opposition to the blackness and defilement of surrounding pollution.

Not only is this handful of saints considered in their relation to those who were about them in Sardis, but their present life is considered also in its relation to the future. Those, and those only, who are the companions of Christ, walking with Him "in white" in the blessed fellowship of earth, shall overcome, and these at last will clothe themselves "in white garments" in heaven. The "worthy" below are to wear the victor's robes above. The word "thus" (verse 5) shows the continuity between

¹ Mark 9. 3.

the life here and the life that is to come. He that is filthy here will continue to be filthy there; and he that is holy here will remain holy there. All character tends to fixedness. Heaven must begin with us on earth, if it is ever to begin with us at all. If the love of Christ does not dwell in us below, we shall not dwell in the love of Christ above. Only the future will be magnified, expanded, glorified experience. The peace, the joys, the hopes, the blessedness of the people of God in this life are but the bud that will yet bloom forth in full glory in the Paradise of God. Heaven will be the equation of earth's best, raised to its highest power. "We shall be like Him." "Who are these that are arrayed in white robes, and whence came they?" "These are they that came out of great tribulation, and they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; therefore are they before the throne."¹

The second promise uttered is, "And I will in no wise blot out his name out of the Book of Life." This is a very familiar expression in the Bible. The true explanation is found in Isaiah 4. 3, "Every one that is written among the living

¹ Rev. 7. 14, 15.

in Jerusalem.” The living in the city had their names written on a muster-roll, and the names of the dead were struck off or blotted out from time to time. O church of Sardis, thy full name shall not be found there ! Thou art dead ; and this is the book of the living only. Only those who are living to God will find their names recorded in the register of the skies. There is no election that is ever going to take a bad man to heaven.

The third promise proceeds, “ I will confess his name before My Father and His angels.” The soldier who has distinguished himself in battle, who rescued the flag, who led the forlorn hope, or who performed yet other daring feats, turns in a critical moment by a brave act the tide of battle, and receives “honourable mention” before the whole army from the Commander-in-Chief. His name is sent on to the Government, and all the wires throb with the message ; and every household in the nation speaks with pride of the deed of valour. For you, too, O overcoming one, there will yet be “honourable mention.” “ I will confess thee before My Father and His angels.”

Is my name written there,
On the page white and fair ?
In the book of Thy Kingdom
Is my name written there ?

Christ's Letter to the Church at
Philadelphia

The Letter of the Lord Jesus,
Our Risen, Ascended and Glorified
Prophet, Priest and King.

Sent by His servant John.

“And to the Angel of the
CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA.

Write :—

These things saith the Holy, the True, he who hath the key of David, he who openeth and none shall shut, and shutteth and none openeth. I know thy works. Behold, I have given before thee an open door which none can shut : because thou hast a little strength and didst keep my word, and didst not deny my name. Behold, I give those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but do lie—behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I loved thee. Because thou didst keep the word of my steadfastness, I will also keep thee out of the hour of trial, which is about to come on the whole habitable earth, to try those who dwell on the earth. I come quickly : keep holding fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. He that overcometh, I will make him a pillar in the Temple of my God, and he shall in no wise go out thence any more : and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God, and my own new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”

Rev. 3. 7-13.

The Isle called Patmos.



Philadelphia

Philadelphia

is the modern city, built on a plateau which rises sharply above the level of the plain. The modern city is built on the plateau.

Philadelphia.

Modern city, looking from the hills to the plain. The ancient walls may be seen along the outskirts on the plain.

East of this plateau, and then the city of Philadelphia, the Ogawa's vale to the descent of the plain beyond. At the base the modern city is built on the plain.

The modern city is built on the plateau. The ancient walls may be seen along the outskirts on the plain. The modern city is built on the plateau. The ancient walls may be seen along the outskirts on the plain. The modern city is built on the plateau. The ancient walls may be seen along the outskirts on the plain.

CHAPTER VI

Philadelphia

IN the interior of Asia Minor is a great central plateau which rises three thousand feet above the level of the sea. The Hermus River and valley extend inland from Smyrna one hundred and five miles, where they reach the foot of this plateau, and then the road ascends by the Cogamis vale to the elevated tableland beyond. At the base the river is not more than five hundred feet higher than where it enters the Aegean at Smyrna. The valley is traversed for its entire length by a railway.

Near the base of this tableland, on the south side of the Hermus, and on the lower slopes of the snowy Tmolus, stood the beautiful city of Philadelphia. At the present time there is a population of from fifteen to eighteen thousand ; and the city has still an attractive appearance as one approaches it up the valley. It

is twenty-eight miles south-east of Sardis, and is connected directly with it by rail. This city was founded less than two hundred years before Christ, and derives its name from Attalus II., whose devotion to his brother Eumenes, of Pergamum, won for him the title of Philadelphus. The great imperial road from Rome to the far East passed alongside Philadelphia. It was, therefore, the gateway—the “open door”—through which the vast trade of Phrygia and the interior found its way downward to the sea at Smyrna.

While Sardis was on the wane when this letter was written, Philadelphia was rising into yet higher commercial eminence. It was strongly fortified. It was the last of the seven cities to lower its flag to the Turks. Isolated and singly, it still continued to maintain “its proud independence as a free Christian city in a Turkish land, until it was conquered by a combined army of Ottoman Turks and Byzantine imperial troops.”¹ Even Gibbon bestowed the following beautiful tribute on the city of this noble church: “Philadelphia alone has been saved,” he says, “by prophecy or courage.

¹ Hastings’ “Dictionary.”

At a distance from the sea, forgotten by the Emperors, encompassed on all sides by the Turks, her valiant citizens defended their religion and freedom about fourscore years, and at length capitulated to the proudest of the Ottomans. Among the Greek colonies and churches of Asia, Philadelphia is still erect in a scene of ruins ; a pleasing example that the paths of honour and safety may sometimes be the same.”¹ This conquest by the Turks took place near the close of the fourteenth century. Thus the city itself reflected in its own history some of those great qualities of steadfastness, holding fast, endurance, in the hour of trial, which are mentioned in this letter, and which in a far deeper and nobler sense characterized this beloved church in her spiritual trials and victories.

Strabo says of Philadelphia that it was constantly subjected to earthquakes. Great masses of lava and cinders near at hand point to recent volcanic action. In the year 17 of the first century of our era, twelve cities in the Lydian valley were nearly destroyed in one night by an earthquake, Philadelphia being the greatest sufferer

¹ “Decline and Fall,” chap. 64.

among them. For a number of years after this, the place seemed to be in a state of almost daily tremor. Most of the people therefore forsook the quaking city, and built for themselves booths and temporary dwellings outside the walls, fearing that they would be crushed to death by remaining in their city houses.¹ How appropriate to them would be the gratifying representation of a mighty city and a temple whose pillars would never be shaken, whose walls would stand secure, where no danger could ever come; so that its happy inhabitants, instead of fleeing away, should "in no wise go out thence any more." The people of Philadelphia could appreciate this representation as could the dwellers of well-nigh no other city. And so we find the imagery of this letter also taking its colouring from the peculiarities of the place.

I. The *Character* in which our Lord presents Himself. Three things are predicated of Him—He is Holy, He is True, and He has the Key. These are all implied in or directly taken from the great vision in the first chapter. The mention of the "key" here carries us back to the statement, "I have the keys of death

¹ Tacitus, "Ann." 2. 47 and Strabo, 13. 628.

and of Hades.”¹ He that is “ True ” is represented by the girdle. John saw on Patmos One “ girded about at the breasts with a golden girdle.”² “ Girt about with truth ” is Paul’s description of the Christian soldier.³ He puts the girdle of truth first in the Ephesians, and the golden girdle meets us near the beginning of the description in Revelation. In one of the great Messianic prophecies of Isaiah, it is affirmed of the “ rod out of the stem of Jesse ” that “ righteousness shall be the girdle of His loins, and faithfulness the girdle of His reins.”⁴ That He is “ holy ” is implied in the impression gathered from the whole vision. It was the sense of Christ’s holiness and sublime moral purity which so awed John that he fell down as dead at the feet of Him whose voice was as the sound of many waters. Now let us look at each of these attributes, holiness and truth, in the order in which they are given.

1. “ He who is Holy.” This is a predicate which belongs in its absolute sense to God alone. “ Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah of Hosts.” Angels are holy, but only in a subordinate

¹ Rev. 1. 18.

² Rev. 1. 13.

³ Eph. 6. 14.

⁴ Isa. 11. 5.

sense. He charges His angels with folly, and the very heavens are unclean in His sight. And this is the absolute quality that is here affirmed of Christ. "I do always those things that please the Father." "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?" "The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in Me." "The sun has its spots, the azure sky its clouds, the purest gems their flaws; but no stain rests upon Him who is holy, guileless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens." ¹

2. "He who is True." The word "true" was a favourite one with the Apostle John. In the New Testament it is found fifty-one times, and of these all but fifteen are in John's writings. "I am the Truth," in that absolute sense which could only be affirmed of God. "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." ² So also in the same Epistle His Son, Jesus Christ, is called "The true God and eternal life." ³ These words "Holy" and "True" here affirmed of the Son are also affirmed of the Father. "How long, O Master, the Holy and True, dost Thou not judge and

¹ Tait, p. 337. ² 1 John 1. 5. ³ 1 John 5. 20.

avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth ? ” ¹ Notice also the beautiful relationship that exists between these two revelations of Christ. Holiness is subjective ; truth is objective. Holiness is what exists within ; truth is its outward expression. Holiness is the cause ; truth is the effect. Holiness is the foundation ; truth is the superstructure. Holiness is the root, and truth is the branches.

3. “ He who hath the key of David ; He who openeth and none shall shut, and shutteth and none openeth.” In the first two affirmations we are told *whom* Christ is ; here we have *what* He does. The key of David is mentioned in Isaiah 22. 22 : Shebna was deprived of office, and Eliakim took his place ; then the prophet adds, “ And the key of the house of David will I lay upon His shoulder ; so He shall open and none shall shut, and He shall shut and none shall open.”

In the opening vision Christ has the keys of death and Hades hanging from His golden girdle. Like Shebna, the deposed, the shadows and types have also now passed away ; and like Eliakim, Shebna’s successor, Christ has

¹ Rev. 6. 10, R.V.

now succeeded to the position of supreme authority, and is vested with all the power of the keys. "All authority hath been given unto Me in heaven and on earth."¹ All things are put under His control—Providence, life, death, Hades, grace, glory. When men on earth arrogate to themselves the use of "the keys," they forget among many things that this right is only delegated to those on whom Christ has breathed His Holy Spirit, and on those only who are acting absolutely in accord with the Divine will. From men's decisions, there is a higher court of appeal. Many on whom they in their ignorance and blindness have professed to shut the door, and whom they have driven as heretics to the stake, have found the door of Paradise wide open to welcome them into the joy of their Lord. How fruitful and suggestive are these titles; and how marvellously appropriate the aspects in which our Lord draws near to this faithful church, that had itself been so *pure* and *true* and *aggressive*.

II. *Commendation.*

If to Sardis *as a church* it was all condemna-

¹ Matt. 28. 18, R.V.

tion, to Philadelphia it is all commendation. Three things are affirmed :—

1. “ Because ¹ thou hast little strength.” This is the literal translation. It means, “ thou hast some strength, even though it be but small.” These are words of commendation. The church may be young and poor and despised, without influential members or social position, nevertheless it may possess some spiritual power. And this is the only power that tells.

2. “ And thou didst keep My word.” Both here and in the following statement the aorist is used, showing that it refers to some definite and distinct trial and testing at some unspecified time in the past, through which the church had gone triumphantly, and from which it came forth pure and victorious. And is not loyalty to God’s Word one of the great needs of the present hour—unshaken, unflinching, unreserved fidelity to the inspired Book ? “ He that hath My Word, let him speak My Word faithfully. What is the straw to the wheat ? saith Jehovah. Is not My Word like a fire ? saith Jehovah ; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces ? ” ² Let us keep it

¹ ὅτι.

² Jer. 23. 28, 29.

in our memory ; keep it in our thought ; keep it in our heart ; keep it in our life ; keep it in our faith ; meditate upon it. It will lift us up to heaven. "The Word of the Lord endureth for ever."

3. "That hast not denied My name." Those who deny the Word will end by denying Christ Himself. This is the necessary and inevitable consequence. Almost every word that we know about our Lord comes from the pages of inspiration. Weaken the testimony of the Bible, and so far you weaken our knowledge of Him whom its mission is to reveal. Destroy the Bible, and the world's knowledge of the Christ is destroyed. The false and superficial learning that attacks the integrity and authority of the Word of God to-day is levelled ultimately against Christ. It is well to understand the end in view. There is no question as to the final result. This Book is an anvil which has broken many a hammer. Far abler men than those who are now attacking it have tried to destroy it, and have dismally failed. The massive arguments in behalf of the Christian religion stand forth to-day unanswered and untouched. And they never will be answered

while man's guilt and Christ's power to save endure. Till then let us sing :—

Ashamed of Jesus ! sooner far
Let evening blush to own a star.

Because of her fidelity, three great blessings were conferred upon this church.

1. "I have set before thee an open door." The reference here is undoubtedly to some special opportunity for missionary service. Of Ephesus, Paul wrote : "For a great door and effectual is opened unto me"¹; and of Troas he also said, "A door was opened unto me in the Lord."² Then you notice especially that this opening was "given" by Him who openeth and no man can shut. It was a gift bestowed. It was an exalted privilege. It was a high honour. All open doors are to be joyfully and enthusiastically welcomed. There is a relation too between the condition of the church and the opportunity placed before her for service. We receive nothing simply for our own sakes. We get that we may give. And we shall receive just as much spiritual power as we are prepared to use in God's service, and never any more. Those who use little will

¹ 1 Cor. 16. 9.

² 2 Cor. 2. 12.

get but little ; those who use much will get much. It is well to pause in this connexion to call to mind the remarkable condition that exists on all sides to-day. A century ago the world, so far as aggressive Christian work is concerned, was like the ancient city of Jericho. It was "straitly shut up." The Church was upon her knees praying for fields in which to labour. Behold the answered miracle ! God came down, and the nations of the earth were shaken with volcanic power. Door after door has been thrown open for the gospel, until like the "man from Macedonia" people are now on the shore of every continent and island and river, and on every mountain top, calling, "Come over and help us." As never before in all history, the fields are ripe unto the harvest.

2. The second blessing assured to this church is victory over her Jewish foes. You will remember that the only other letter of the seven in which Jews are mentioned is the one to Smyrna. The resemblance between these two churches is so striking as to place them in a class by themselves. For both a time of trial is in store, out of which they are each to emerge

with honour; and only in these two letters is there made mention of the victor's "crown." But the triumph vouchsafed to Philadelphia is far richer and greater than that to Smyrna. In the city by the sea, all that is promised is that her Jewish foes shall not prevail against her; but in the city by the mountain, her beautiful love and loyalty to her Master will be such that some of her bitterest Jewish foes will be transformed into her warmest personal friends. Among her persecutors will yet come some who will prostrate themselves before the church and see that God is with her. This is the only place in all the letters where we meet with the expression, "and to know that I loved thee." How exquisite this is! "Them that honour Me I will honour."

3. And God will be with her not only in the present, but also when future trials come. "Because thou didst *keep* the word of my steadfastness, I will also keep thee OUT OF¹ the hour of trial, which is about to come on the whole habitable earth, to try those who dwell on the earth. I come quickly: [in this terrible judgment] keep holding fast that which thou

¹ ἐκ.

hast, that no man take thy crown." The expression "the whole habitable earth" signified the Roman Empire. The historic reference is undoubtedly to the ten years of persecution during the reign of the Emperor Trajan. It was much more general and severe than the persecution under either Nero or Domitian. Now for the first time the edict was passed that being a Christian constituted in itself a capital offence.¹ "Philadelphia was the only church in the seven which escaped unscathed the persecutions of Trajan; and the reason which philosophers have assigned and historians given is that Philadelphia was subject to earthquakes, and that the Roman Emperor with all his sanguinary cruelty was afraid to go there himself or to trust his generals and armies in a place so dangerous."² God can keep His own who are faithful to Him as easily by filling the heart of an Emperor with fear as by any other means. He can save us, as he did Philadelphia, by warding off trouble, and He can also save us, as He did Paul, in the very midst of trouble.

¹ Ulhorn, "Conflict of Christianity with Heathenism," p. 258.

² Wills, "The Seven Churches of Asia," p. 294.

A writer in paraphrasing the triumphant challenge of the Apostle exclaims: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall tribulation?* No: it shall but hurry us to Him for shelter. *Shall distress?* No: it shall only make us grasp the more firmly His pierced hand. *Shall persecution?* No: the dungeon shall be a Bethel, and the martyr’s cross shall only be the passport to the martyr’s crown. *Shall famine?* No: in the land of his exile the prodigal will more quickly return to his Father’s house, where there is plenty and to spare. *Shall nakedness?* No: there is a robe of spotless purity which Christ offers to all who will accept it, in which we can stand in the presence of God, faultless before His throne. *Shall peril?* No: as He came in the fourth watch of the night to His despairing and toiling disciples, who, through the rifts of the storm saw His form and heard His voice, so shall we, in the dark night of our difficulty hear Him say, ‘It is I, be not afraid.’ *Shall sword?* No: it is powerless to sever the ties which bind us to the everlasting throne. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.” Hallelujah to our

King ! Happy the saint of God ! In every temptation He will furnish him with a way of escape.

II. The *Counsel*.

Only overcome, and then there are the most precious of promises. We are introduced to the home of the ransomed. It is a city, the New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven. We here anticipate the twenty-first chapter, where all that is rich and rare and wonderful and vast is massed together in bewildering magnificence, to give us some faint inkling of the glories which lie beyond. Ezekiel closes his book with the following words about the coming Jerusalem : “ And the name of the city from that day shall be, Jehovah is there.” And notice in the twelfth verse of this letter, we meet four times with the expression “ my God ” : the city of “ my God ” ; coming down from “ my God ” ; the temple of “ my God ” ; having the name of “ my God ” written upon its very pillars.

Twice in the twenty-first chapter we are told of this city that it has the “ glory of God ” ¹ in it. The old Jerusalem at the time this letter was written had vanished from off the earth, other than a distressing heap of ruins ; but, lo !

¹ Rev. 21. 11 and 23.

before us there bursts upon our vision, as through the rifted clouds, this resplendent city of our God. The old Jerusalem was of the earth earthy ; it was from beneath. The new Jerusalem is from above. The old sinful city had become worn out and had passed away ; into the new nothing that defileth can ever enter. Oh, the tears that were shed, and the earnest pleadings over the perished city of the past ! but the new is the city of unending joy. Philadelphia was tossed with earthquakes—fit symbol of the unstable and vanishing possessions of earth ; but the church in Philadelphia looked forward to a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God, a city that cannot be moved.

The next picture is that of a temple—a place of worship—“the temple of My God.” And in this temple are these beautiful pillars, so secure, so stable, so strong. Each pillar represents one who has overcome. All believers are described as living stones. A well known expositor elaborates the metaphor of Christians resembling pillars after the following quaint fashion : “They are founded on the basis of a firm faith mounting up with the clear shaft

of a shining life, and having their persevering tops garlanded about, according to God's promise, 'I will give thee a crown of life.'"¹ The language is compacted so closely together that one figure blends with another. Some have thought that the pillars were sculptured in human form, like the Caryatides now in the Erechtheum at Athens; but this weakens and mars the simplicity and the dignity of the whole figure. Inscriptions were written on pillars. In one of the mosques in Philadelphia, there are to be seen at the present time four noble pillars, "yet standing *in situ* bearing very ancient inscriptions. They formerly supported the dome of a Christian church."² The inscriptions here are three:—

1. "The name of My God." The sculptor chisels his own name on the column he builds; and it will abide there while the monument endures, to declare "this is mine" and to commemorate his genius. It is true that everything we behold proclaims that "the hand which made it is Divine"; yet these things are vanishing, and shall wax old as doth a garment. But

¹ Quoted by Dr. McLaren, "Victor's Crowns," p. 54.

² McIlvaine, p. 90.

when Christ inscribes His name, to endure when the heavens and the earth are no more, He does it on His own masterpiece—a human soul—rescued from the degradations of sin, made pure with His own purity, perfect with His own perfectness, strong with His own strength, and lifted up from the earth and transplanted into His temple in the skies, where it shall abide for ever to the praise of His glory.

2. The second inscription is “the name of the city of My God.” This implies citizenship. In a sense we might say that the name of our own city is inscribed on every one of us. We belong to it. It becomes part of our own name. It is necessary to our complete address. Here we are enrolled. Here we exercise our franchise and our freedom. It is here our loved ones and kindred dwell. On earth we are but pilgrims and strangers, and our real citizenship is in heaven.

3. The third inscription is “My own new name.” “Thou didst not deny My *name*, and therefore have I given thee My own especial and peculiar *new name*.” Gather up all that Christ is in the Revelation, and then gather up all

that He is and ever has been in the experience of His people: and, if it be possible, label that with a name. Then remember that this is only the beginning. Eternity lies before us. There are to be fresh revelations of His character, fresh disclosures of His glory, fresh manifestations of love, fresh vistas of truth, fresh summits of vision—still it will be the old name, Jesus; but yonder He will be so much more to us than He is now, that we shall need new names with which to speak of the newer things that He is yet to be to us. And this will go on for ever. Ever the same, and ever more and more throughout all coming ages. Now notice two activities of thought:—

1. “A little strength”—that is the Christian as we see him in the church below: “a pillar in the temple of My God”—that is what he is to be in the church above; out of weakness made strong. Do not judge the giant of the forest by the twig just peeping out of the ground at spring. Yes, we may be feeble and weak and irresolute and faltering and erring here; “but it doth not yet appear what we shall be: for we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him” whose new

name we bear; "for we shall see Him as He is."

2. And the second thought is the immovability of these pillars. They "shall go out thence no more" from My temple. Contrast the temple in which we worship below with the temple that is above. Where are they, those standard-bearers, those true, tried noble men and women who were once pillars in our places of worship? We do not see them now. Their seats are vacant; their voices are hushed; they bow with us no more in prayer. We miss them when counsel and courage and help are needed. Where are they? Silently, one by one, they left us, going out to return to us no more. Those pillars are for ever removed.

Compare next the vision of the temple which is above, which rises before us in this message. There the redeemed abide, secure and safe in the presence of their Lord; all temptations past, all blessings in store, all joys begun. "Who would not yearn for that city out of which no friend departs?"¹ "He shall in no wise go out thence any more."

¹ Augustine.

Jerusalem, my happy home,
Name ever dear to me,
When shall my labours have an end
In joy and peace and thee ?

Oh, when, thou city of my God,
Shall I thy courts ascend,
Where congregations ne'er break up
And Sabbaths have no end ?

Christ's Letter to the Church at Laodicea

The Letter of the Lord Jesus,
Our Risen, Ascended and Glorified
Prophet, Priest and King.

Sent by His servant John.

“And to the Angel of the
CHURCH IN LAODICEA

Write : —

These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God. I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would that thou wert cold or hot. So because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am about to spew thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing ; and knowest not that thou art the wretched one and pitiable and poor and blind and naked. I counsel thee to buy of me gold refined by fire, that thou mayest become rich ; and white garments, that thou mayest clothe thyself, and that the shame of thy nakedness may not be made manifest ; and eyesalve to anoint thine eyes, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I reprove and chasten ; be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock ; if any one hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and I will sup with him, and he with me. He that overcometh, to him will I give to sit down with me in my throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”

Rev. 3. 14-22.

The Isle of Patmos.



CHAPTER VII

Laodicea

LAODICEA was the furthest east of all the seven churches. It was situated near "the gate of Phrygia," forty-two miles south-east of Philadelphia. Formerly a Roman road, a railway now connects it with Smyrna, one hundred and sixty miles away. Like Philadelphia, it too was near the foot of the great central plateau of Asia Minor. The river Meander breaks abruptly through the mountains near it, and flows through an expansive and fertile valley, onward to the Western Sea. It is joined on the south by the river Lycus; and this route beside the river bed being more gradual, it was the one followed by the traffic which connected the West with the interior of Asia. Nine miles east of the confluence of the Meander and the Lycus, and about two miles south of the latter river, is the locality where Laodicea was built. The city stood on a number of low

hills, and was strongly fortified. It was "the guard and doorkeeper" of the great road that led west to the Mediterranean. The location was very beautiful. To the south there extends a mountain range over 8,000 feet above the level of the sea, and to the north another range about 5,000 feet high.

The city was founded by Antiochus II., about the middle of the third century B.C. and was named after his wife. It remained comparatively unimportant under the Syrian kings; but after it passed into the possession of the Romans, it rose into great opulence and power. The ruins there at present extend over a large extent of ground, and contain the remains of an immense amphitheatre, a stadium with the seats still in place, an aqueduct, the foundations of several churches, and various kinds of sculpture that attest the former greatness of Laodicea. Strabo speaks of one of its merchant princes who bequeathed to the city 2,000 talents to be used for public purposes. Josephus speaks of the large number of Jews that were attached to the city by reason of its financial transactions; and Cicero mentions his purpose to cash his bills of exchange when

he arrived there. Its coinage continued in "a rich unbroken series to the time of the Emperor Diocletian."¹

The city was destroyed by an earthquake in the year 60 A.D.; and although the Imperial Government was ready to bestow financial aid, Laodicea declined the generous proffer and soon recovered its former prosperity. How the words recur to us, "I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing."

Then again, it was a manufacturing centre. Especially famed throughout the world was this city for a variety of woollen goods, of which its merchants were very proud, and which were made from the glossy fleeces of the flocks of sheep that grazed in that neighbourhood. Is there any implied hint in this imagery at the garments of purity with which the Master promises to clothe the nakedness of His saints? Connected with one of its pagan temples was a renowned medical school. One of the preparations made there was a medicine for the eyes; a powder, or substance, which was exported and came into common use throughout the Greek and Roman world. It is interesting

¹ "Encyclopædia Britannica."

to note that the very word which Galen, the distinguished physician, used in writing of this ancient preparation of Laodicea is the one used in this letter.¹ “In the midst of thy great spiritual blindness I will furnish thee with the true eyesalve, to anoint thine eyes that thou mayest see.” Near the city there is a stream of tepid water, from which is taken the striking illustration that so forcibly describes the spiritual condition of the church—neither cold nor hot. So that the language of this letter is likewise strongly coloured by local conditions.

Laodicea was one of three neighbouring cities, Hierapolis being six miles to the north, and Colossae eighteen miles to the east. All three are mentioned in the Epistle to the Colossians, which was written about the year 62 A.D. At that early date, Laodicea was already a church well known to Paul. Hierapolis is mentioned in connexion with Epaphras, as is also Laodicea.² We read,³ “For I would have you know how greatly I strive for you, and for them of Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh.” Again,⁴ “Salute the

¹ κολλούριον.

² Col. 4. 13.

³ Col. 2. 1.

⁴ Col. 4. 15.

brethren that are in Laodicea.” We are told¹ of a letter to the Laodiceans—in all probability the circular Epistle to the Ephesians—which was sent on to be read in Colossae. Paul’s Colossian letter was also to be read in Laodicea. All this shows us the close and intimate relationship that existed specially between these churches. We may assume that their needs were much the same. The dangers to which they were exposed from false teaching would be similar; and therefore the remedy to be effected by the exchange of these great Epistles was also the same. They were penned more than thirty years prior to this message from the island of Patmos.

This letter to the church in Laodicea is the saddest, and at the same time the most tenderly pathetic and beautiful, of all the seven. Notice how the number *three* runs through it. There are three predicates affirmed of our Lord. The Amen, the Faithful and True witness, the Beginning of the creation of God. There were three points in which the church supposed she excelled, and on account of which she was perfectly self-satisfied—she was rich, she had gotten riches,

¹ Col. 4. 16.

she had need of nothing. Three affirmations are made as to her actual condition, namely, that she is the wretched one (and that includes being pitiable and poor), and naked, and blind. And there are three courses of action that the Lord urgently counsels, namely, to buy of Him gold, and white raiment and eyesalve. Then come the touching pleadings of the Kingly stranger, with His locks wet with the dews of night, knocking for admission; and the promise to him that opens; and the marvellous blessing to the saint that overcomes.

I. The *Character* in which our Lord introduces Himself. There is an air of completeness and finality about this introduction. It is the last of the seven letters, and therefore Christ is the "Amen." In Isaiah the Lord Jehovah is called "The God of the Amen."¹ Twice the word "Amen" meets us in the first chapter of Revelation.² This is the only case however where it is used as a proper noun. The meaning will appear when we recall how one person in corroborating another may say, "I say Amen to every word," approving fully of the statement of the other. He endorses it; he ratifies it; he sets his seal to it; he makes it his own. So Christ is

¹ Isa. 65. 16, R.V. *marg.*

² Verses 6 and 7.

not only the Amen as being the last, the ultimate, the final authority, but He is also the Amen to every truth in all the universe. He is, moreover, the Yea and Amen to all the promises of God. Therefore He stands out in contrast to the false pretensions and assumptions of this church.

He is “the faithful and true witness.” With eyes like a flame of fire piercing everywhere, He has been walking in the midst of the golden lampstands. He has beheld all that has taken place. Nothing has escaped Him. He is a witness whose knowledge is immediate and first hand. None can deceive Him. He is the true witness. And He is yet more than that. All that a man testifies may be true, but many things might be kept back that are also true. Christ is the faithful as well as the true witness. “Faithful are the wounds of a friend.” He tells us all our faults and sins and failures and shortcomings; and He does this because He loves us, and in order that He may rescue us from those sins.

3. He is “The beginning of the creation of God.” Translate the word “beginning”¹ by “origin,” or “author,” or “the fountain head

¹ ἀρχή.

and source." All things were created by Him ; therefore He Himself is the uncreated, the eternal, the first cause. We have noticed that it was specially demanded that the Epistle to the Colossians should be read to the church in Laodicea. How they would listen as they heard this sublime passage: "The Son of His love, in whom we have the redemption, the forgiveness of sins ; who is the image of the invisible God, the Firstborn"—not in the sense of succession in time, for the Godhead is of eternity ; but in the sense of rank and oneness of nature—"the Firstborn of every creature ; because in Him were all things created, in the heavens and on the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions, or principalities or powers ; all things have been created through Him and unto Him, and He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together."¹ Men must cut these words out of the Bible, or otherwise admit the deity of Christ. And this whole passage is simply an exposition of the last great title by which our Lord introduces Himself to the church at Loadicea. It is as though He said : "I am the Amen : therefore My

¹ Col. 1. 13-17.

statement of your condition is true. Think not that in any way you can mislead or deceive Me. I am the faithful and true witness; and therefore I will deal honestly with you, and tell you all your faults and needs. I am the Creator of all created things; and all the wealth of the universe is Mine. Be zealous, therefore, and repent; and yours shall be a heritage that will never fade away. I am the Amen."

II. *Condemnation.*

Alas, there is nothing to commend. We have not even a loyal few like those in Sardis, who had not defiled their garments. If anything could add pathos to the terrible tragedy of the situation, it was that the church itself was utterly oblivious of its own dire condition. There are diseases that flatter and lure onward with bright promise, while at the same time they undermine and destroy. No doubt this church was rich in a material sense; thus standing out in marked contrast to the neighbouring church in Philadelphia, which was poor and weak, its only possession consisting of "a little strength." Situate in that rich eastern city, the Laodicean church was apparently the wealthiest of the seven. It had means enough to

carry on all its enterprises magnificently, and leave handsome balances on the right side of the account at the close of every fiscal year. Not only had it wealth, but it kept adding to it. "I have gotten riches." And there was a sense of perfect contentment, satisfaction, and independence—"I have need of nothing." Every want was gratified, every wish fulfilled. The church had settled down into a condition of the utmost self-complacency, and did not want to be disturbed. It might, however, have all this material prosperity, and yet be thoroughly consecrated to the service of Christ. We must go deeper than external things if we would get at the kernel of this solemn message. The contrast shows us that the church's great self-deception was in spiritual matters. The letter does not imply, "Thou sayest I am materially rich, while in reality thou art materially poor." The poverty was spiritual. The church lived in a condition of complete spiritual blindness as to its actual position before God; and nothing can be more awful than this. It was a case like that of which Hosea writes, "Ephraim said, Surely I am become rich. I have found me wealth; in all my labours they shall find in

me none iniquity that were sin.”¹ In Laodicea the people were like those at Corinth of whom Paul wrote, “Already are ye filled, already are ye become rich.”² One stood before God’s altar, and with uplifted head prayed, “I thank Thee that I am not as other men”; and another stood beside the altar’s God with bowed head and sobbed out, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” That is the contrast—self-centred, self-satisfied, at ease in Zion; complacently thinking themselves rich in all attainments and possessions, while they were in a state of the most pitiable and abject need. How completely the mask is torn off! Let us listen, in awe, to what Christ had to say to them.

1. “Thou art” (and the “thou” is emphatic) “the wretched one.” The descriptive word used here is only once employed elsewhere in the New Testament, of the condemned man chained to a corpse and dragging the dead body about with him. “Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”³—the most appalling of all possible conditions.

2. “Pitiable.” It means in a most distressing plight. Only once is this expression found

¹ Hos. 12. 8, R.V. ² 1 Cor. 4. 8. ³ Rom. 7. 24.

elsewhere in the New Testament, namely, "We are of all men most miserable." ¹

3. "Poor." The word means absolute beggary, like that of the pauper in his rags shivering on the streets.

4. "Blind." The pathetic sight suggested is of a blind man with his stick groping his way along the road, with no one to take him by the hand.

5. "Naked." Clothed only in tattered rags, and moving you to throw some garment of warmth around the shivering form.

This was what the Amen, the faithful and true witness, found in Laodicea. "I am rich." "Thou art in the last degree of wretchedness; thy plight is most pitiable; thou art a shivering beggar in a wintry storm, with no home to shelter in." "I am increased in goods." "Thou art naked." "I have need of nothing." "Thou lackest everything." How startling is the power of self-deception! We have now seen what the church supposed itself to be, and we have seen what it really was in the sight of the great Searcher of hearts. And finally we have the attitude of the church toward ser-

¹ 1 Cor. 15. 19.

vice. “I know thy works. Thou art lukewarm—tepid, apathetic; neither cold nor hot”—like that stream of water flowing past outside the city. This expression is used three times. It were better to be cold! It is easier to reach a totally unconverted man than to stir a Christian professor to whom all the appeals of Calvary have become like a thrice-told tale. It were better still to be hot! “Real Christian love is too deep for fanaticism, and too fervent for indifference.”¹

The church was orthodox, but indifferent; it had no outstanding vices, and no virtues; would not resist, would not help; professed to believe in the fact of sin, and then excused it; declared that men were lost, but was stirred to no effort to save them; believed in the cross so long as it was a pleasing ornament suspended from their clothing, but “a wooden cross and iron nails and agonizing death are another matter.” There was no passion, no enthusiasm, no warmth, no fervour, no emotion.

Dr. G. Campbell Morgan tells us how William Booth was led to enter upon earnest work for God. It was due to an infidel lecturer, who said, “If I believed what some of you Christians

¹ Cumming, p. 459.

believe, I would never rest day or night telling men about it." That sentence went home; and the Salvation Army belting our planet with its earnest workers is the result. There is nothing so abhorrent to God as a lukewarm Christian. This is "the worst form of blasphemy." It negatives in conduct all that we profess in words. It is the divorce between conscience and action. This tepid church is represented as producing nausea. "I am about to spew thee out of My mouth."

III. *Counsel.* "I counsel thee to buy of Me gold refined by fire, that thou mayest become rich; and white garments that thou mayest clothe thyself, and that the shame of thy nakedness may not be made manifest; and eyesalve to anoint thine eyes, that thou mayest see."

The first thing that impresses us here is the use of this commercial term "buy." Did we not think that "all the blessings of heaven were free? And yet here is the purchaser's word. Let us remember concerning the two parables, the hidden treasure in the field and the goodly pearl, that in each case the purchaser sold all that he had, and bought and secured what he desired." They bring before us a most im-

portant truth. It is by selling, or parting with, all our own possessions that we secure all that which Christ bestows. We are made poor, in order that we may obtain that which alone can make rich. We must have nothing, if we would possess all things. Becoming empty, He will fill us. There are three objects of purchase :—

1. True riches, as opposed to false ; gold refined by fire without any alloy or tarnish ; wealth that has stood the testing ; riches that abide. In discussing the Christian religion we are not speaking of a faith which has not been proved. “ From the righteous Stephen, the first Christian martyr, all through the centuries, the gold of a pure and steadfast faith has been thoroughly put to the test ; and whether ‘ tried ’ in the dungeon, or at the stake, it has always come forth bright and furbished.” ¹

2. True purity—the fine linen, white and pure, “ in which all-perfect heavenly dress, we shall for ever shine.”

3. True vision, so that we can see ourselves, and also so that we can see Him. What a revelation of self, and what an unfolding of

¹ Tait, 425.

the unsearchable riches treasured up in Christ ! “ Buy of *Me*,” without money and without price, and all these blessings shall be thine. On the margin of a book kept in the British Museum there are pencilled in the handwriting of Coleridge these impressive words : “ For a great part of my life I did not know that I was poor and naked and blind and miserable. And even after I did know that, I did not feel it aright. But I thank God I feel it now somewhat as it ought to be felt. Stand aside, my pride, and let me see that ugly sight—myself. I have been deceived all my life by sayings of philosophers, by scraps of poetry, but most of all by the pride of my own heart, into an opinion of self-power, which the Scriptures plainly tell me, and my repeated failures tell me, that I possess not. It is the design of the religion of Jesus Christ to change men’s views, to change their lives, and to change their very tempers. Yes, but how ? By the superior excellence of its precepts ? By the weight of its exhortations or by the promise of its rewards ? No ; but by convincing men of their wretchedness, and guilt, and blindness, and helplessness. By inculcating the necessity of the remission

of sins, and the necessity of supernatural light and assistance, and by promising to the penitent sinner, and by actually conveying to him, these evangelical blessings.”¹

This brings us again to that wonderful picture of yearning and pitying love—Christ standing at the door and knocking for admittance. From my boyhood I remember hearing this text used in preaching to the unconverted. While the application is true enough in itself, yet this is not the meaning here. It is at the door of the church that Christ is standing asking to enter. It is the church in its corporate character that is here before us. Then what can this picture mean? Christ is shut out of His own church! “He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.” O my soul, can this be true! Shut out from the inn, Thou wast born in the rude stable; shut out from earth, Thou wast buried in a tomb; but when Thou didst come with pierced feet to the gates of Thy own church, for which Thou didst die, and knock with Thy wounded hand, and plead with Thy gentle voice, didst Thou find

¹ Quoted by Dr. A. Whyte in “Bible Characters,” p. 306.

the door shut in Thy face, and wert Thou left outside and alone ?

Let there be no misunderstanding. The question is not one of our salvation. That we received once for all when we believed. I am speaking of special spiritual blessing—the mutual banquet—to which Christ would come only to find the door shut in His face. How far has He been excluded from our own thoughts ? We have time enough for everything else, but how little time for Him ! How far has He been excluded from our affections, giving the first and the best to others, and the last and the least to Him ? How far has He been excluded from our wills, using them for our own purposes and not bringing them into submission to His mind ? How far has He been excluded from our consciences, leaving them dark and often misguided ? And yet there the Master stands waiting outside, ready to enrich and satisfy and bless : “ Behold, I stand at the door and knock.”

Here we have also the manner in which a religious revival begins. Does our Lord wait lingering without until the whole church is quickened and comes and unlatches the door ?

Then I fear it would never be opened. Does He wait for a committee from the church to come and open the door and escort the heavenly Stranger in? That, too, I fear would be only somewhat less hopeless. "He waits for a man. 'If any *man* hear My voice, I will come in to *him*, and will sup with *him*, and *he* with Me.' I will first be his guest, 'I will sup with him.' He shall be My guest, 'and he with Me.' I will sit at the table which his love provides, and satisfy My heart. He shall sit at the table which My love will provide, and satisfy his heart." ¹ One heart is opened, one soul hears the message, one life is touched by heavenly fire, one child of God enters into special fellowship with the King; then another, and then another, until the whole place is visited by the power of the Spirit of God! "If *any man* hear My voice and open the door" the work has begun. Then comes the final promise. This is the highest and richest of all. So low down was Laodicea, that the one who overcame from that sad church would be rewarded with the very climax of the seven blessings. He shall "sit." No more battle and conflict and struggle and

¹ Dr. G. Campbell Morgan.

worry. "Rest be thy new employ." It is to be on a "throne" too that he is to sit. Just as Christ's overcoming becomes ours, so also His throne becomes our throne, His glory becomes our glory, and His heaven becomes our heaven. The servant shall be as his Lord. Then last, highest and best of all, he shall "sit with *Me*." "And so we dwell together, my Lord and I." With these blessed words upon our lips we close our studies. "He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches." Amen.

DATE DUE

--	--	--

THE KING'S LIBRARY



3000021930

PROPERTY OF
THE CHURCH ON THE WAY

